Backwards

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Backwards

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Summary

Todoroki wanted to permanently get rid of all conversations and plans for an arranged marriage imposed by a family tradition. Bakugou wanted to fabricate a scandal to get a break from villain recruitment attempts once and for all.

Didn't that mean their current goals and needs were aligned perfectly?

That was how Todoroki ended up proposing to Bakugou without any warning, followed by them tying the knot in the blink of an eye as the start to the most backwards relationship anyone could ever imagine.

Notes

Hi, everyone! I've been a bad girl...
I was doing so well, slowly working through my ongoing works one by one while resisting the temptation of starting new fanfics. Well, the temptation won with this one ^.^'

Soooo I guess TodoBaku Mondays are back?

I hope you all enjoy it and get a great start to your week! <3

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1

Todoroki Shouto - pro hero Shouto, as of the past three years - knew right away that a certain dreadful moment was finally drawing closer when he received an invitation to go out for lunch from his father via text.

Initially, he tried to decline the invitation by claiming he was far too busy with work that day to meet with him. But his father, Todoroki Enji, was technically his boss, pro hero Endeavor, and, hence, he was the one in charge of deciding his work schedule. Being too busy could not be used as an actual excuse now, and neither could he claim to already have plans made for that time slot when he had just tried to fool his father into thinking he didn't have a moment to spare for leisure lunches. Todoroki also wasn't all that good at lying. Finding some sort of excuse under duress only made coming up with a lie even harder.

In the end, Todoroki had no other choice but to notify the hero agency that he would be out on a lunch break with the big boss and then meet up with his father at an upscale restaurant located just a couple of streets away. Thanks to having gotten a private room for the two of them, he didn't even have to change out of his hero costume. The whole thing stank of an elaborate trap, and Todoroki went in with his guard raised sky-high.

Their lunch began like every other meal they shared together, a bit awkward with some pleasantries and small talk, followed by uncomfortable silence as they decided on what to order. Once the dishes had been served and their assigned waitress had left the private room, the true objective of that last-minute lunch meeting was finally revealed.

"I have some files here I'd like you to read through whenever you have the time," said Enji after having loudly cleared his throat. He grabbed a thick paper pocket folder that he had left on the empty

chair next to him and placed it on top of the dining table before sliding it closer to his son. “There’s no rush or deadline to meet, but I think it’s about time you start looking more closely into it.”

“.....” Todoroki silently dropped his expressionless gaze to the pocket folder. The cover had no words written on it or clues that indicated the type of files compiled inside, but he could tell right away what they were, taking into consideration what his father had just said. After a small sigh, Todoroki rested the cutlery he was holding on the sides of his plate and addressed Enji head-on. “I already told you I don’t want to have anything to do with Quirk marriages.”

“It’s a family tradition, both from my and your mother’s side of the family,” sighed Enji, already resigned to the fact that there would be some pushback from his son. “Generation after generation, all of our ancestors had arranged marriages organised by the corresponding heads of the family. This is simply how things have been done for centuries now, even before Quirks were a thing.”

“I don’t care about family traditions, I’m not go-” Todoroki continued to argue back, deadset in declining such an unreasonable, antiquated tradition no matter how many times his father tried to push him into it, but he was quickly cut off by him.

“And this isn’t a Quirk marriage,” reiterated Enji, his big, muscled body uncomfortably shifting in his seat. He, too, fully placed down his cutlery on his plate, his scarred face serious but also slightly contrite. “I now recognise that marrying someone just for the sake of mixing specific Quirks is a dangerous long-term mistake. I want to be the last one in our family to make such a bad choice. However, I still want to follow the family tradition of doing arranged marriages the old-fashioned way. That’s why I used our long-standing family connections and selected several spouse candidates who would be a good fit for you. Quirks were not taken into consideration when I was making that list, you can rest assured of that. There are even several young ladies there who are Quirkless.”

“That’s not the problem here,” nearly groaned Todoroki, already feeling very fed up with this conversation. “I don’t want any type of arranged marriage, period. Some family traditions are better off forgotten in the past rather than used and abused in modern times. What difference does it make whether I get married to someone of your choosing or don’t get married at all? I’m still going to continue being a pro hero and carry on with the family legacy. Isn’t that more than enough?”

“For now, sure, it’s working out just fine,” acknowledged Enji, despite already shaking his head in apparent dissatisfaction. He crossed his arms over his chest and tightened his stern gaze, his blue eyes closely observing his son. “But you are only in the beginning stages of your career and during a relatively calm period at that, now that the League of Villains has been dismantled and All for One is long gone. Things are bound to become a whole lot harder and busier as time goes on. Living alone and being the sole person responsible for your livelihood outside of working hours will be too much of a burden. All of those daily tasks will pile up on top of your duties as a pro hero and run you down more and more until it reaches a breaking point. And that’s when accidents happen and heroes are lost, sometimes forever. Having a wife would lessen some of those burdens, as well as give you one more reason to come back home alive once things get tough during a particularly dangerous fight or mission.”

“I make more than enough money to hire someone to look after household tasks and cooking if I ever need help with those things,” deadpanned Todoroki, verbally slaying those (admittedly very true and sensible) arguments in the blink of an eye. “Besides, I already have plenty of reasons to come back home alive. Adding one more wouldn’t make much difference.”

“You’re so stubborn…” sighed Enji under his breath, his shoulders dropping just a tiny little bit. By the expressionless yet decisive look on his son’s face, he could tell there was no use continuing this conversation right now. He wasn’t going to change Todoroki’s mind in the slightest at this point in time. “Why don’t we continue this

conversation at a later time, once you've read all the information and the profiles of those young ladies? Think about it for as long as you need. If no one in that folder interests you, there are plenty of other candidates that haven't been included in today's list. If anything, there's a long line of women your age who would love to marry you, Shouto. You can literally have your pick in this regard. So keep that in mind and make your decision, the sooner the better."

I think I already made my decision more than clear…, Todoroki pointed out in the back of his mind. There was no use continuing to argue back and forth with his father, though; they were both equally as stubborn and far too unwilling to compromise on such a sensitive topic.

Their lunch meeting would and indeed did end in such an impasse, with Todoroki feeling quite peeved at his father for being such an old-fashioned, pig-headed geezer that shouldn't be making such unreasonable demands of his children while also seeking to make amends with them, and with Enji grumbling under his breath about not expecting his youngest son to reach the peak of his teenage rebellion as a young adult.

It was needless to say that Todoroki would never say yes to an arranged marriage, regardless of it being because of Quirk affinity or just to gain a free houseworker. He was against it as a matter of principle - after all, he had seen firsthand how much misery and pain it could bring to those involved. But that wasn't all there was to it. There were two other big factors as to why he was so against it.

The first one was that he didn't want to burden his mother with even more guilt. While their relationship was now that of a regular mother and son, Todoroki could tell she still felt some guilt about her past actions - or the lack thereof, in this case. She probably believed that if she had somehow talked it through with her husband, maybe their parenting style and expectations wouldn't have destroyed their oldest son. If she had been stronger, their second and third children wouldn't have had to be raised separately from their other siblings. If she had been a better mother, she could have protected their youngest from

those abusive training sessions and her own mental breakdown.

If Todoroki was strong-armed into an arranged marriage, would his mother also blame herself for it? Seeing as it was a family tradition that came from both his father's and his mother's family line, it was very likely she would feel guilty over it, yes. That was the last thing Todoroki wanted.

The final factor was a more personal one, something Todoroki had never shared with another soul. While he knew he was his own person and had broken free from a lot of generational trauma, a small part of him feared that he would one day start copying his father's behaviour if he was ever put in the same position as him. It sounded completely ridiculous, given the type of person Todoroki was, but even so… That small doubt kept popping up whenever the topic of arranged marriages came up, gnawing at him and making him fear and abhor his future self.

With all that taken into consideration, Todoroki had long decided that he would never, under any circumstances, accept being involved in a Quirk or an arranged marriage. He was ready to fight tooth and nail to decline any such offers, whether they came from his own family or from someone else.

However, he also wasn't all that interested in continuously being pestered with conversations like that one or sudden marriage proposals. He wanted to bury this matter as soon as possible so he could focus all of his energy on his job as a pro hero, rather than worry about being tricked into going on blind dates organised by his father or whatever else crazy schemes Enji might come up with after being told no one too many times.

Todoroki needed a concrete and permanent way out of all the arranged marriage discussions.

If he had a lover, like his older brother Natsuo had had at the time, he could have used that as some sort of leverage. Natsuo was obviously also aware of this family tradition, and the moment Enji started nagging him about arranged marriages, he managed to convince him to postpone any decisions until he graduated from university. However, on the very same day he received his college degree, Natsuo also announced he had gotten married to his then-girlfriend. That instantly destroyed all conversations of arranged marriages, and their father was forced to give up on pursuing that matter further. All in all, it had been a brilliant plan that Todoroki unfortunately could not copy, as he didn't have a girlfriend.

He also couldn't use the impressive feat his sister managed to come up with as a long-term solution to any and all conversations about arranged marriages. She had long graduated from university and had a very stable job as a teacher. Initially, she had plans to quit and work in a different field, but she soon changed her mind and started working anew at a local elementary school. Given the nature of her job, she claimed she did not want to get married and would instead spend the rest of her life raising and teaching the children of others, which would indirectly fulfil her 'duties' as a woman. There were a few complaints about it at first, but their father eventually gave up on it and let her pursue her life plans with his full support. Seeing as Todoroki was a pro hero and had no plans to become a teacher of any sort, he would also not be able to use a similar strategy.

But then, what else could Todoroki do to free himself from such a sticky, complicated situation?

Should I lie and say I'm already dating someone?, wondered Todoroki to his own buttons as he casually walked around downtown, as per his afternoon patrol route. Yes, he could lie and pretend he was dating someone, but again, he wasn't very good at lying. He probably would get caught very fast. And if he didn't, he would eventually get backed against the wall once his father started pestering him to meet his so-called girlfriend.

Such thoughts soon changed into wondering if he could get someone

to pretend to be his lover temporarily, just until he found a different way to escape that cursed family tradition.

But such a plan also had several drawbacks. If he asked a woman to pretend to be his girlfriend, she would get roped into a quite dramatic family feud. Involving an innocent bystander in such a problematic situation didn't sit all that well with Todoroki, especially since he had no way to predict how she would react to his father's unreasonable demands and old-fashioned ways, or even what his father would force that poor woman to do to be accepted into the Todoroki family. There was also the possibility of his fake girlfriend falling in love with him for real at some point and then wanting to turn their pretend relationship into an official one, which would be just as, if not even more, problematic than an arranged marriage…

Yeah, asking or paying someone to pretend to be my girlfriend would definitely be a bad idea… I think…, concluded Todoroki in the back of his mind, trusting this gut feeling he was having and pushing that plan into his mental trash can. He sighed, "But if I can't pretend I already have a girlfriend, then what exactly could I-"

His ongoing inner turmoil was suddenly interrupted by the violent sound of a loud explosion. A few passersby walking past him ducked down and protected their heads, thinking debris or broken glass was about to fall on them. Fortunately, whatever it was that caused that blast was somewhat contained to the detonation area only, and so that portion of the downtown ended up being relatively damage-free.

But that didn't mean Todoroki could just leave it be. He promptly switched into serious mode and used his Quirk to rush towards the area where the explosion occurred. As luck would have it, Todoroki didn't have to travel too far. In a matter of minutes, he was staring down at a familiar entity - who he supposed had been the instigator of the explosion - and a poor soul quaking in his boots, despite not seeming all that inclined to give up just yet.

“Baku- I mean, Dynamight,” Todoroki called out, fumbling his words a little bit out of habit of using one name over the other.

“Huh? ‘The heck are you doing here?” growled Bakugou Katsuki - aka pro hero Great Explosion Murder God Dynamight -, his face crooked with a raging frown. He was currently grabbing a shabby, dishevelled man by the collar of his scorched shirt. “I’m almost done dealing with this piece of shit. I don’t need any backup.”

“C-C’mon, don’t be like that. The least you could do is hear me out until the end!” That man tried to reason, his arms gesturing around emphatically. “All it takes is a single glance to know you’re on the wrong side! You are a natural-born villain, my guy! Even your hero name is a dead giveaway! ‘Great Explosion Murder God’? Yeah, that’s the coolest villain name I’ve heard in my whole life!!! With you as our leader, we’d conquer the whole world in record time!”

“Shut up, the adults are busy talking right now!” hissed Bakugou, stuffing his hard, pointy knee guard on the man’s lower abdomen in an attempt to silence him. Once the man was whimpering in pain, he turned his focus back to Todoroki. “Where were we? Oh, right. He’s as good as arrested. You can leave. I’ll be just fine waiting on my own for the police to come and drag his sorry ass to jail.”

“Right,” deadpanned Todoroki, briefly glancing at the whining man before he returned his gaze to Bakugou and his frowning face. “I see you’re still the same villain magnet of always.”

“Fuck off!” Bakugou yapped back in retaliation, giving a quick kick to the man’s limp leg as a way to release some stress and bottled-up anger. “It’s not my fault these morons are not only stupid but also blind and delusional to boot. The only god damned silver lining in this is that they all come to me on their own, rather than me having to hunt them down one by one.”

“W-We can’t help it, okay…?” stammered the man, his voice strained and weakened by pain. Nevertheless, his eyes remained steadfast and determined, like he was willing to sacrifice himself so long as he managed to accomplish his objective. “Y-You are like a beacon to this new age. You represent everything that the villains of the old age were lacking, from your Quirk to the way you carry yourself. Those on my side can see it. And I bet those on that side see it too. T-There’s a reason why you can’t climb higher than number 5 in the Hero Billboard, yeah? They will never give the spotlight to someone meant to be the leader of all villains, even if you are undisputably the strongest pro hero in this entire country. Don’t think having a clean record and zero scandals to speak of will give the world a better impression of you. If anything, having such a pure white reputation since you went pro only makes you look even shadier. No one knows anything about your private life, no believable rumours are being spread around, and no journalist or paparazzi has been able to dig up any sort of information on you aside from what you do during your working hours. Heh, all of that makes people stop and think… ‘Just what kind of illegal, backhanded tricks has he been using to keep himself this pristine? He definitely has to be hiding something dark behind his saintly façade.’ Hehehe, poor you, Dynamight! Being the strongest and yet ending up hated because of that strength! But don’t worry! Me and my brothers and sisters will welcome you in the underworld with arms wide-”

“I told you to shut up already, you fucking asswipe!” growled Bakugou, this time going all out with his next strike. The moment he hit the side of the man’s neck, his body went completely limp as he lost consciousness. Bakugou simply clicked his tongue and let him drop to the ground, removing a pair of handcuffs from a pocket to get this criminal restrained while he couldn’t fight back or struggle. As he did so, he kept grumbling under his breath, “These delusional assholes sure like to yap away… I’m getting sick and tired of hearing the same dumb story every single time these fucking morons want to recruit me or whatever…”

“You seem to be having it hard,” said Todoroki, sympathising quite a bit with his former classmate’s struggles. He had to agree that one of the hardest aspects of being a pro hero was public perception. Bakugou had his cards set against him when it came to captivating public attention and affection, as he did indeed look more like a

villain than a hero as he raged around and exploded with stuff. His aggressive personality and tendency to cuss with very colourful terms also didn't help much.

"I'm used to it already," grumbled Bakugou after clicking his tongue in annoyance a second time. He dusted off his gloved hands and then got back up from his crouched position, always keeping the man he had captured under his gaze as a precaution. "What I can't get used to is being constantly approached by these douchebags. Fucking hell, they are such a pain in the ass…! I'm starting to think maybe I should fabricate some sort of scandal or something just to look more 'normal', whatever that even means."

"Fabricate a scandal…?" repeated Todoroki, one of his eyebrows arching slightly in surprised puzzlement. That sort of thing was something he had never expected to hear coming out of Bakugou's mouth.

Despite his evil appearance and gremlin-like personality, Bakugou was actually the least 'problematic' of this new generation of heroes. Plenty of corrupt or half-hearted pro heroes had been arrested or quit their jobs during the bloody war against the League of Villains, and the new version of the Hero Public Safety Commission had made sure to pay very close attention to those who remained in the hero business and the new folks dipping their toes in it. It was now a whole lot harder to become a sidekick, let alone a proper pro hero. But that didn't mean that those working in the pro hero trade didn't mess up every now and then. They were only human, after all.

That's why it was quite common for scandals and rumours to surface every other week, much like it happened in the celebrity universe. Todoroki himself had a few of them already, as anytime he was seen in public with a woman, whether she was a colleague or simply an acquaintance, rumours and news articles immediately started creating a whole romance novel out of it. There was no truth to it, however, so they all eventually faded away after trending online for a couple of days. Some of his former classmates had also been caught 'red-handed' for a myriad of other reasons, like Mineta having several accusations

of sexual harassment, or Hagakure being labelled as an undercover spy for villains due to being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Todoroki didn't remember ever having heard of any scandals related to Bakugou, and the few rumours floating around about him were all based on hasty perceptions of his outward appearance and personality or things that had happened when he was still a high school student. He also kept his private life fully under wraps, to the point that only his family and closest friends knew about what he did outside of his working hours. The paparazzi constantly following him around to 'catch him in the act' hadn't even figured out where he lived yet, such was his success in separating work from leisure.

"Yeah, like coming up with a stupid but plausible story and then feeding it to the press or to one of those professional stalkers that make Izuku look like a newb," scoffed Bakugou with a dismissive shrug of his shoulders. "Anyway, get going already before the cops show up. I don't want people to think I needed help to deal with this weakling."

"....." Albeit Todoroki heard every single word Bakugou had just spat out, his brain was too busy focusing on a different aspect of their conversation to actually process them and act accordingly.

Todoroki wanted to permanently get rid of all conversations and plans for an arranged marriage imposed by a family tradition. Bakugou wanted to fabricate a scandal to get a break from villain recruitment attempts once and for all.

Didn't that mean their current goals and needs were aligned perfectly?

Todoroki would be able to get a fake lover who could deal with his father's unreasonable demands without breaking a sweat, and Bakugou would be able to fabricate the scandal of a lifetime in a way

that didn't negatively impact his reputation or job status.

Before he even fully noticed what he was doing, Todoroki grabbed Bakugou's arm, not too strongly but still tightly enough to hoard all of his coworker's attention and suspicion. His thoughts, his expressionless demeanour, and his whole body had gone into autopilot as he got more and more onboard with that sudden genius idea. It all culminated in him blurting out the most shocking line of his entire life.

"Bakugou, will you marry me?" said Todoroki without missing a beat, his face fully void of expressiveness. His mismatched eyes shone bright with gravity and sincerity, however, indicating that he had meant what he had just said and was not trying to pull a silly prank on his former classmate.

Bakugou's response was the expected, absolutely flabbergasted "Huh?" that anyone in his shoes would utter without thinking straightaway.

Chapter 2

“So? What kind of dumb Quirk were you affected by this time?” asked Bakugou at long last, after being made to wait hours on end until the conclusion of his shift. He was currently inside a private booth in a little izakaya shop he was familiar with, accompanied by Todoroki, who fortunately was working the same shift as him that day.

“Hm? I haven’t been affected by any Quirk?” pointed out Todoroki, his head slightly tilted to the left in a clear display of confusion.

“I call bullshit! Why else would you ask me to marry you!?” hissed Bakugou, hitting his fist on the low table they were sitting at before accusingly pointing with his finger right at Todoroki’s face. “If it’s not a Quirk, then you really need to go to the hospital ASAP! You must have a fuckin’ brain tumour or one nasty concussion!!”

“I’m pretty sure I don’t have either,” deadpanned Todoroki, leisurely taking a sip of his drink. Since he was provided with such a convenient opportunity, he wanted to have a proper conversation with Bakugou to discuss what had actually happened and, hence, he had simply ordered some soda rather than the more appropriate alcoholic beverage, given their current location. Once he placed his glass back down, Todoroki couldn’t help the small sigh that exited his lips. “It’s a long story, but I’d really appreciate it if you could listen to it from start to finish first.”

“I feel like leaving already…” groaned Bakugou, his sixth sense screaming at him that listening to Todoroki would get him involved in one hell of a sticky situation. However, both his pride and his curiosity wouldn’t allow him to just up and leave just like that after being the one who basically grabbed Todoroki from his hero agency and then dragged him all the way to this izakaya. He let out a long, tired sigh and then placed his elbow on the table, resting his face on his open hand. “Go on, I guess…”

“To sum it up, my family has this annoying tradition of organising arranged marriages, and my father has started pestering me about it,” explained Todoroki, his whole body straightening up to a more proper seiza sitting position on his cushion. Despite the nearly completely expressionless demeanour of his face, his voice sounded particularly fed up with the situation he was narrating. “I don’t want to do it, not now, not ever, so I figured marrying you would be a good way to turn down any arranged marriage requests from now on and, hopefully, for the rest of my life.”

“Okay, if it’s a long story, then make it long, don’t try to summarise it with your Pulitzer-worthy speaking skills!” groaned Bakugou yet again, his voice dripping with sarcasm and exasperation. “Also, what the hell do I have to do with your stupid family traditions? If you don’t wanna get married, then don’t get married!”

“You know how my father is. If saying no was enough, I wouldn’t be here having this conversation with you,” pointed out Todoroki, his gaze momentarily dropping to his glass. He wasn’t a big fan of dragging other people into his family issues, but since this could be mutually beneficial for them, he felt inclined to make an exception for this proposal. “That’s why I figured I would be better off faking some sort of relationship with someone of my choosing. But, again, you know how my father is. Asking or paying a woman to pretend to be my girlfriend would probably… no, definitely end very badly. It needs to be someone who can easily deal with my father and his unreasonable demands.”

“Right. But why me specifically?” asked Bakugou, an eyebrow arched in puzzlement. “I’m pretty sure there are several of our former classmates who would fit that role way better than I ever could. Can’t you go ask Uraraka or Yaoyorozu to pretend to be your girlfriend for a while or something?”

“I mean, weren’t you saying you wanted to fabricate a scandal to get rid of those villains constantly asking you to join their side?”

explained Todoroki, earnestly looking at Bakugou with his head slightly tilted - something that strangely made him look like a large, goofy dog begging his owner for some treats or to go out for a walk, as far as Bakugou was concerned. “Well, I can be your scandal. You get to be the talk of the town in a way that doesn’t affect your reputation or puts your job at risk, and I get to avoid an arranged marriage orchestrated by my father. It’s win-win for both of us, right?”

“.....” Bakugou opened his mouth to say something, but he then found himself questioning what exactly he was trying to express in the first place. Sure, he had indeed said he wanted to fabricate a scandal, but he meant it more as a vent than a proper scheme that he was seriously considering. After all, there were several different things he could do before he was forced to play such a hit-or-miss card.

Having Todoroki phrase this give-and-take proposal in such a way was making him change his mind on it, however. A sudden marriage announcement undoubtedly was the sort of positive scandal that could make a hero seem more ‘normal’, like they were a regular person just living their life and following the exact same steps and stages as everyone else. It would also quell those pointed whispers accusing him of hiding some dark secrets just because he kept his private life far away from the public eye. Plus, seeing as homosexual relationships were fairly common and well-received in modern times, there would be hardly any issue with them publicly disclosing they had gotten married.

All in all, there were next to zero downsides to Todoroki’s crazy yet fitting proposal.

“.....Do we really need to get married, though?” Bakugou asked with a certain reluctance after a long stretch of total silence to digest everything that was at stake here. Those words that had just gotten out of his mouth already felt awfully foreign to him, but the fact that he was actually considering accepting such a deal was what baffled Bakugou the most. Maybe he also needed to be checked by a doctor for any brain tumours or concussions…

“If we say we’re just dating, I’m pretty sure my father will try to find a way to break us up by deceiving me into going on blind dates or by sending me on extended missions on the opposite end of the country,” deadpanned Todoroki, feeling a bit cynic when it came to thinking up all the different methods his father could use to sabotage their so-called relationship. “Getting married makes it official in an undisputed way. Plus, it will be a pretty convenient excuse for you. You can say this relationship is why you’ve been keeping your private life a secret from the public all of these years.”

“Ugh, that’s true…” conceded Bakugou after a half-hearted, annoyed groan. If they just randomly announced they were married without showing any proof of them first dating, people would start suspecting that it was all a lie. But if they used Bakugou’s secret private life as an excuse as to why the public didn’t know about their relationship and vice versa, they might be able to fool everyone into just accepting it as is. “Going all out at the start might also be the best way to milk a scandal for all its worth…”

“Does that mean you’re going to accept my proposal?” asked Todoroki, his expressionless face gaining a bit more emotion and energy. For some reason, the possibility of Bakugou saying ‘yes’ to his plan was making him feel weirdly happy and excited. It was probably only because he felt so relieved about the prospect of escaping that cursed family tradition of arranged marriages, though…

“Don’t start getting all gung-ho about it already, Half-and-Half Bastard,” said Bakugou, his gaze tightening into a frown out of the blue. “First things first, we need to make a clear, concise plan about it that includes all details and objectives. Unlike you, I don’t half-ass anything that I do. I go for perfection and first place, always. We also need to decide how far we’re willing to go and agree on a timeline.”

“So you are going to accept my proposal,” concluded Todoroki, ignoring completely his coworker’s tsundere-ish retorts and grumbles. He did, however, agree that they needed to plan this really well or

they would eventually get caught by someone who wasn't meant to know about any of this. "So long as we get married through the official channels, I don't have any other goals or demands. I just want my father to give up on making me do an arranged marriage. As for a timeline… I wasn't planning on dating anyone, let alone getting married, while working as a pro hero. We can stay married for as long as you want and then get a divorce or something once you're done with your side of the deal. By that time, I should have come up with a different way to block the arranged marriage family tradition for good."

"Dating and marriage weren't in my life plans in the first place either, so I couldn't care less about being in a marriage of convenience for a few years or however long we'll need," declared Bakugou with a quick shrug. He lifted his head from the hand he had been resting it at and then crossed his arms over his chest. "Since both of us are in agreement about that, it's just a matter of fine-tuning it to our regular lives. I like my daily schedule as it is, and I don't wanna change it too much."

"You also live on your own, right?" asked Todoroki, trying to remember if he even knew where Bakugou lived. Since nothing came to mind, he had probably never gone there, which sounded valid considering the type of relationship he had with Bakugou. They weren't necessarily close friends, but they had known each other for long enough and worked together enough times to be far more than simple coworkers or acquaintances. "We could rent a place big enough for both of us to live together without constantly stepping on each other's toes. Like when we lived in the school dorm, basically. That would also give the impression of us being newlyweds."

"Agreed. Don't think I'm gonna cook for and clean after you, though. I ain't a live-in housekeeper," scoffed Bakugou, despite nodding his head in assent. "With our salaries combined, we can easily find a nice place that is close to both of our hero agencies. My only requirements for it are my own bedroom and bathroom. I also want to design the kitchen personally, since I need it to be up to my high standards."

“Deal,” Todoroki concurred with a single nod. He was currently renting an apartment, in which he had been living alone for close to two years now. Breaking the lease midway through its contract would be a bit of a pain in the ass, but it was a small headache he was willing to tolerate. The other thing that might be a bit of a headache was… “Now for the wedding itself and the announcement…”

“There’s no way in hell we’re having a wedding ceremony of any kind. It’s courthouse only or I’m out,” vehemently declared Bakugou, the stern glint in his eyes a testament to how serious he was about it. Fortunately, both of them were on the same page about that aspect of their deal, too.

“Yeah, I also prefer it that way. It would be a waste of money and time to do something big,” agreed Todoroki, feeling quite relieved about that response. Not that he actually thought Bakugou was the kind of man who wanted to go all out with his wedding or anything, mind you. “But I do think we probably should take some days off at the same time after signing the paperwork. Rather than focus on a wedding, we can make a big show out of moving in together. That would make it easier to control the narrative and show the journalists and paparazzi only what we want them to see.”

“That’s not a bad idea, actually. It would give me enough time to get my new kitchen fully operational and running exactly to my liking,” said Bakugou, giving that suggestion in particular a bit more thought. “Besides, I’m pretty sure those professional stalkers will drive me nuts with all of their questions and whatnot. I could use a break from them, too, without having to also worry about work.”

“We can always go somewhere as a ‘honeymoon’ if they start being too annoying,” added Todoroki after a small sigh. Thanks to his past scandals, he knew full well how persistent certain journalists and paparazzi could be while chasing trending news. Both of them were fairly famous pro heroes, constantly showing up in the news due to their victorious fights against villains since the time they were high school students. The entire mass media world was guaranteed to be turned upside down the moment they made the marriage

announcement, not to mention the explosive impact it would have on all sorts of social media.

“Let’s keep that as a backup plan for now…” grumbled Bakugou, his body fidgeting just a little bit as he tinkered with his cold, humid glass. “The next question is the big reveal and how we should go about it. I mean, it would be a terrible idea to spring this up out of the blue on everyone, right? Ugh, my old hag would definitely skin me alive if I got married behind her back…”

“I think it’s fine to tell the truth to the people we trust,” said Todoroki, trying his best not to chuckle at Bakugou’s shuddering reaction to his mother’s possible overreaction. “You can tell your parents this is just a fake marriage or part of a special mission.”

“Oh yeah, I’m definitely gonna tell them the truth or else I would spend the rest of my life hearing snarky comments and digs from that wench,” scoffed Bakugou. He knew his mother would never let him live it down if he kept this a secret from her, even if said marriage was nothing more than a way out of certain issues they currently had. “We should also tell our morons the truth. Who knows what they might babble about to other people if they think we’ve been secretly dating this whole time… It’s best to keep them up-to-date with this whole plan than to see it being ruined by their lack of brain cells and loose lips.”

“That’s true,” said Todoroki with a quick nod. He couldn’t help but wonder how Midoriya would react once he told him he was going to marry his childhood friend and lifelong bully. His friend would probably have a heart attack if that announcement wasn’t followed by ‘everything I just told you is part of an elaborate plan for me to escape an arranged marriage and for Bakugou to stop being headhunted into villainy’. Just the thought of that brought a smile to his lips, which was his best attempt at not outright laughing all on his own. To distract himself from such amusing thoughts, Todoroki added, “I think I’ll tell my mother, sister and brother about it too. Both Fuyu-nee and Natsu-nii enacted their own plans to escape the arranged marriage tradition. I’m sure they’ll be a huge help in deceiving my father.”

“Oh yeah? What did they do?” snorted Bakugou, his lips twisting into a mischievous smirk. Creating evil little schemes to avoid arranged marriages was the sort of family tradition he was on board with, so he grabbed his drink and started sipping it while he waited for Todoroki to spill the beans.

“Natsu-nii convinced my father to pause all plans until he was done with college, and then announced he had married his girlfriend on the day he got his college degree,” explained Todoroki, which gained him a pleased and slightly smug cackle from the devilish gremlin known as Bakugou Katsuki. “Fuyu-nee said being a teacher and helping raise the children of others would be more than enough in terms of accomplishing her ‘duties’ as a woman. She doesn’t plan on getting married ever, either way, so it was that or nothing.”

“Heh, those two must have split all the smart brain cells between themselves and left you with just the dense ones,” mischievously giggled Bakugou, inwardly giving his seal of approval to those two siblings and, apparently, future in-laws. “Though I guess I can see why you couldn’t just go ahead and copy their escape methods. You don’t have a girlfriend, and you aren’t working as a teacher either.”

“Yeah. And since I’m the last one, I’m sure my father will be even more pushy and desperate to make me do it and keep that family tradition alive,” sighed Todoroki, his shoulders dropping just a little bit. His excitement died down a fraction and was replaced by annoyance as he remembered how his lunch with his father had gone. “Today he gave me this thick folder filled with detailed information on a bunch of women who are willing to get married to me…”

“I can’t tell if you’re bragging or complaining,” snorted Bakugou with a dismissive roll of his eyes. Todoroki had gone full deadpan mode as he grumbled that. Had Bakugou not had any context to go along with it, it would be a 50/50 chance which way those words should be interpreted. But seeing as he was begging Bakugou to marry him instead, the intense dissatisfaction buried deep inside that monotone

voice was easy to see. “Nah, never mind. You’re picking a fake marriage with me over every single one of those chicks dying to get in your pants. Endeavor must have terrible taste in women, hehehe. No offence to your mother, by the way.”

“My grandparents were the ones who arranged for them to get married, so none taken,” deadpanned Todoroki, not even thinking twice about dismissing Bakugou’s sarcastic remarks as something not all that important. In all honesty, he hadn’t opened the pocket folder yet, so he couldn’t say whether his father had done a good job at selecting his prospective brides or not. But that was beside the point.

“Alright, I think we’ve pretty much covered all the main bases already,” said Bakugou as a way to get them to focus on the important stuff once again rather than keep on bashing good old Endeavor. “When are we doing this? I don’t have any important missions slotted for the next couple of weeks, but who knows what those morons that are trying to recruit me will do next. What’s your current schedule li-”

“Tomorrow,” declared Todoroki out of the blue, once again adjusting his sitting position so his back was as straight as an arrow and as formal as if he were truly asking for Bakugou’s hand in marriage.

“...Huh?” That was all Bakugou managed to blurt out at first, thinking he must have misheard something since they had both spoken at the same time. But nope, sadly he hadn’t.

“Let’s do it tomorrow,” repeated Todoroki once again, perhaps due to having misunderstood Bakugou’s flabbergasted expression as an indication he hadn’t understood what that ‘tomorrow’ stood for. “The courthouse is open from Monday to Friday, right? Tomorrow is Friday so let’s do it tomorrow.”

"WHAT!?"

Chapter 3

“Ugh, I’m so damn tired…” groaned Bakugou as he closed his apartment’s front door. After removing his shoes and putting on his slippers, he pretty much dragged his feet to the living room and kitchen area. He was no longer in the mood to do anything, so he simply set his belongings on the kitchen counter and went to wash up and change.

His conversation with Todoroki had been riddled with shocking bombs, most of which were dropped on him without any warning, leaving him at the very least mentally drained from the rollercoaster of emotions after talking it through with him for well over two hours.

In the end, Bakugou wasn’t able to change Todoroki’s mind about going to the courthouse tomorrow and getting their marriage officially registered the day after they made this deal. The main reason for it was that they should act as soon as possible so as to not raise any suspicions. If they took too long to make their first definitive move, Todoroki’s father would probably think they were scheming something so that his son wouldn’t have to go through with the arranged marriage.

Since Todoroki was so determined to act before his father initiated round 2 of their feud over family traditions, Bakugou couldn’t even try to reason with him that courthouse visits were done through scheduled appointments, and they couldn’t just show up there whenever they felt like. He thought such an argument would make Todoroki slow down his rushed timeline, but Todoroki then threw him a curveball by claiming he’d pull some strings and arrange an appointment at their local courthouse for tomorrow.

Bakugou remained sceptical of that until Todoroki’s smartphone rang halfway through their intense discussion. When Todoroki showed the message to Bakugou, he saw there a date and a time for tomorrow with the words ‘marriage registration’ preceding them. He still had no

idea what sort of strings he had pulled in a matter of minutes, but the fact that it had worked was indisputable, much to his annoyance.

So, all in all, Bakugou and Todoroki would be going to the courthouse to officially register their fake marriage tomorrow afternoon. The rest of their deceitful master plan would be implemented afterwards and a whole lot more slowly, as it was far too complicated to rush finding a new apartment and then moving there while also juggling their busy work schedules.

Still, that leaves me only less than half a day to explain the situation to everyone who needs to be aware of the truth, tiredly sighed Bakugou in the back of his mind as he exited his bedroom, now clothed in the casual wear he wore whenever at home. Even just a few hours of advance warning would save him a lifetime of hearing his mother crack stupid jokes at him for getting married in secret. However, that didn't mean the conversation itself would be any easier, whether it came before or after his courthouse wedding with Todoroki.

"Argh, let's get something to eat before I get started with that freakin' headache of a conversation…" grumbled Bakugou under his breath as he stomped to the kitchen. He still wasn't in the mood to cook anything, so he just grabbed some leftovers from yesterday's dinner and heated them up in the microwave after neatly plating them. To those who didn't know better, they would have thought Bakugou had just spent a few hours painstakingly preparing a gourmet meal for himself.

He then carried the plates to the low table in front of his sofa rather than the dining table. Once everything was set to his liking, Bakugou turned on the TV, intending to catch up on the latest news while eating his dinner. That's when he noticed what time it was.

"Crap, wasn't I supposed to have that stupid video call meetup with those idiots tonight…?" mumbled Bakugou as he was forced to get up from the sofa and return to the kitchen counter, where he had left his

smartphone. Since it was on silent mode, he hadn't noticed the buttload of messages and notification he had been receiving the past few minutes. "Ugh, I guess one of the conversations is about to go down…"

Feeling twice as moody now, Bakugou stomped back to the sofa and dropped his tired body in the soft cushions. He quickly opened the app that he and his friends usually used for group video calls and then placed his phone on the table in front of him, perfectly angled and aligned on a stand so the front camera could catch him. As soon as his account went online, Bakugou got an invitation to join an ongoing video call.

"Bakugou! You're finally here!" cheered Kirishima, his arms raised up in the air in celebration.

"We were starting to think you were either bailing on us or had forgotten about our long-distance meetup," chuckled Kaminari, a shit-eating grin on his face.

"See? I told you spamming him with messages would do the trick," proudly declared Sero, his chest slightly puffed out. *"The best way to summon our beloved powder keg is to annoy him nonstop!"*

"That's also the best way to get punched in the face the next time we see each other in person…" nearly growled Bakugou, one of his eyebrows twitching with that annoyance they purposely had sent his way, by the looks of it. "And yeah, I was so busy today, I completely forgot about it until I saw what time it was on the TV. You spamming me with messages had nothing to do with it, you geniuses!"

"C'mon, don't sweat the little details. The most important thing is that we're all here now!" said Kaminari, dismissing his friend's complaints with a goofy wave of his hand.

“What got you so busy, though?” asked Kirishima in an attempt to steer the conversation to less tempestuous waters. *“You don’t have any big missions planned for the next couple of weeks, right?”*

“Yeah, but I guess now I kinda have one last-minute mission of some sort going on…” grumbled Bakugou, the frown on his face deepening but, at the same time, also becoming visibly less angry. “I’m getting married tomorrow, it seems.”

Both Kaminari and Sero simultaneously spit the beverages they were sipping the moment those words left Bakugou’s mouth. Kirishima hadn’t been eating or drinking anything at the time, so his jaw simply dropped to the floor without a single sound. That mix of coughing and flabbergasted silence was soon replaced with something far noisier, however.

“””What!?””” The three of them yelped nearly at the same time, with Kirishima even grabbing his phone to bring the screen closer to himself.

“W-What do you mean you’re getting married tomorrow!?” sputtered Kirishima, panic and shock blending in his face, which was already getting pretty distorted in the video by the nervous shaking of his hands.

“How the heck are you getting married tomorrow!?” asked Kaminari next, so confused by that sudden announcement that he was starting to wonder if maybe he was having some sort of lucid dream or a hallucination. Everything he had been drinking was non-alcoholic due to tomorrow’s work shift so he couldn’t be drunk right now…

“Never mind that! Who are you even getting married to???” Came Sero

next, his eyes as round and big as saucers as he hurriedly wiped the wet table with a napkin. *“As far as we know, you’re not dating anyone right now or, like, EVER!”*

“Exactly! Who the heck have you been boning behind our backs!?” demanded Kaminari, clasping and shaking his smartphone in place of grabbing Bakugou by his shoulders and shaking him around a bit so he’d tell them the truth.

“Can you guys calm down and shut up for a few minutes so I can finish what I was saying?” sighed Bakugou while rolling his eyes in exasperation. This reaction they were having was exactly why they needed to be kept updated about his fake marriage deal with Todoroki from start to finish. Once they had quietened a little bit and were nervously staring at their screens, Bakugou continued, “I just said I got roped into a last-minute mission, didn’t I? I’m not getting married for real, it’s all part of the plan. Once our goal has been accomplished, you can bet we’re getting divorced faster than you can sing the ABC.”

“What kind of crazy mission would even involve getting married to someone?” asked Kirishima, surprisingly feeling even more confused now that Bakugou was explaining whatever that was supposed to be.

“Ugh, it’s a long story, but to sum it up, Todoroki wants to escape this arranged marriage he’s being forced into, and I wanna fabricate a scandal to get rid of those pests constantly asking me to become their new villain boss, so we’re temporarily teaming up to sort out those two things once and for all,” explained Bakugou as he rubbed his temple with the pads of his fingers. These back-to-back pain in the ass conversations were starting to give him a splitting headache…

“Wait, you’re getting married to Todoroki!? As in, Todoroki, our former classmate and your eternal rival for the number one spot!?” yelped Kaminari, so shocked about this unexpected plot twist that he had no idea if he should pick up his jaw from the floor first or pinch himself to figure out once and for all if he was dreaming or not.

“Who the hell are you calling my eternal rival!? I’ve proved to the whole damn world time and time again that I’m far superior to him in pretty much every single metric!” scoffed Bakugou, beyond offended to be accused of such a farfetched thing. “Our goals are fully aligned when it comes to these two problems, so we’re gonna use each other to solve them for good. What’s wrong with that!?”

“There’s nothing wrong with it per se but…” hesitantly mumbled Kirishima, his hand awkwardly rubbing the back of his neck.

“It’s just that this is so out of left field, I still can’t believe this isn’t some sort of elaborate prank or a crappy joke,” said Sero, probably matching perfectly what Kirishima was trying to convey by the way he was nodding his head along. *“…It’s not actually a prank or a joke, right?”*

“Believe me, part of me still hopes it was,” snorted Bakugou, his voice dripping with sarcasm. “But nope, we’re getting married for real. We literally have an appointment booked at the courthouse for tomorrow afternoon.”

“Damn… Who would have thought the Top Two would also nab the two first spots in the ‘Which Student of Class A will get Married First?’ race…” marvelled Kaminari, his voice solemn as he slowly nodded his head, arms crossed over his chest. Five seconds later, he, Kirishima and Sero burst out laughing out loud, with Kaminari even bending over the table and tapping his hand on it non-stop. *“Buwahahahahaha! This is freaking hilarious! Ahahahaha! Todoroki and Bakugou getting married… because of a team-up they’re organising on their own…! Ahahahahahaha!”*

“Holy shit, this is funnier than those sitcoms we used to watch together at the dorm!” said Sero in between snorts and long bouts of uncontrollable laughter. *“We gotta share this 'wonderful news’ with the rest of the class! Also, when’s the ‘wedding ceremony’? I need to make sure I’m free that day and that my camera is fully charged! Pfft,*

ahahahahaha!”

“I hope you’re having me as your ‘best man’!” giggled Kirishima, wiping the tears from his eyes with the back of his fingers. *“Just give us a date and I’ll be sure to travel all the way there from Osaka to help you organise everything. Will you also need some extra help while you two are away on your ‘honeymoon’? I can ask Fat Gum to temporarily transfer me over there to keep your territory safe and sound from those guys trying to recruit you while you two are living it up as ‘newlyweds’!”*

“You guys are so fuckin’ childish,” groaned Bakugou with an annoyed roll of his eyes. He picked up his phone from the stand and then added, “You know what’s up already, so be sure to not blow our cover once we go public with our fake marriage. If anyone asks you about us, just pretend you knew about it this whole time or whatever. But be warned… Say the wrong thing to the journalists, and you will be the first ones I’ll take down once I join the fucking underworld!!!”

With that threat spewed with a metric tonne of repressed anger, Bakugou ended his connection to that group video call and logged out of the app altogether. He was still fuming mad when he slammed his smartphone on the table, grabbed his dinner and turned up the volume of the TV once again.

“Seriously, those guys are such walking menaces… If they weren’t such a huge liability, I wouldn’t have told them anything myself and would have left all of that work in Half-and-Half Bastard’s hands, since he’s the one rushing the whole marriage thing…” grumbled Bakugou under his breath as he shovelled food into his mouth. Not even five minutes after he had ended the video call, he noticed from the corner of his glaring eyes that his smartphone was vibrating, the screen lit up and with a certain idiot’s name on it. He was far too angry to want to waste any more of his precious free time entertaining his brainless friends, but against his better judgment, Bakugou grabbed his phone and answered the phone call. “What now!?”

“You hung up so fast, I couldn’t even finish what I was about to say next to congratulate you on this huge next step in the tall, steep ladder to adulthood,” jokingly sighed Kirishima, foregoing the usual greetings since they had been talking until a couple of minutes ago. However, when he heard Bakugou grinding his teeth out of deep-seated rage, he cleared his throat and changed his tone. *“All jokes aside, are you two really going to get married?”*

“I already told you this isn’t a prank,” groaned Bakugou as he loudly exhaled his frustrations and allowed his body to fall back against the sofa’s cushy backrest. “We’re getting married, moving in together, doing what we need to do to sort out our issues, and then we’re getting a clean, easygoing divorce once everything is done. The end. Also, we don’t need your help with anything. We’re not getting married for real, alright? There’s going to be no wedding ceremony or honeymoon, everything will stay the same aside from our current addresses. So sorry to burst your delusional bubble, but no best man role for you.”

“Ahahaha, I know, I know,” chuckled Kirishima, feeling a bit more relieved now that he could hear the sarcastic tone in his friend’s voice. *“By the way, what was that thing about an arranged marriage?”*

“It’s some sort of family tradition on both sides of his family tree or whatever,” said Bakugou with a dismissive shrug of his shoulders. “Todoroki is against it but Endeavor is being a pain in his ass and trying to convince him to do it. You know, the usual stupid Todoroki household feud.”

“I’m surprised he came to ask you for help, though,” pointed out Kirishima, feeling a bit awkward about how to react to his former classmate’s family issues. They were all aware of the problematic things that had happened in Todoroki’s childhood, courtesy of Dabi publicly exposing his father during the war against the League of Villains, but they hardly talked about it, both with Todoroki and amongst themselves. Not that that mattered all that much in regards to Todoroki’s marriage of convenience with Bakugou. *“He could have asked any of the girls to pretend to be his girlfriend for a while before*

coming to you."

"I told him exactly that, but he said he prefers me since I can easily tame and domesticate Endeavor any day of the week, hehehe," snickered Bakugou, a mischievous smirk at long last popping up on his lips. "Or at least that's how I interpreted it. The biggest reason is just that it's more convenient like this for both of us. I get to sort out my problems, he gets to sort out his. It's win-win for everybody involved, so there won't be any hard feelings once it's time to end the fake marriage with a real divorce."

"Man, you must be really desperate to sort out things on your end if you're willing to go to such lengths…" sighed Kirishima, feeling a tinge of sympathy towards his best friend as he heard him say the 'I get to sort out my problems' remark. *"Are things really getting that bad with those guys trying to recruit you for the position of villain boss…?"*

"……Kinda, I guess," grumbled Bakugou after a notoriously long pause. "Did you hear about that hostage situation I dealt with last week?"

"Yeah, it was a bank robbery gone wrong, right?" said Kirishima, perking up a little bit at the mention of an incident he remembered seeing in the news recently.

"That's just what we allowed to be publicly announced," tiredly sighed Bakugou, his gaze dropping to his half-eaten dinner. "What actually happened is way worse than your regular bank robbery. They didn't really care about the money, they just wanted an excuse to bait me there so they could talk with me privately. The only demand they made while threatening to kill all the hostages was for me to be the one to deal with that case. Well, the police did just that and called me over there. Once I got inside of the bank, they started with the usual spiel of me being a natural-born villain and yada yada. You get the gist. I didn't think twice about beating the living daylights out of them on the spot. They were total weaklings, so it was a walk in the park

for someone as strong as me, hah! The problem was what they said as they were being escorted outside by the police officers…"

"W-What was it they said…?" asked Kirishima, nervously gulping down the large lump that appeared in his throat due to those ominous words.

"Apparently, I passed all of their stupid tests or whatever it is they've been doing these past few months," explained Bakugou, his gaze tightening as a deep frown slowly took over his whole face. "According to them, I'm now ready to take command of my new role as their boss and can start whenever I feel like. They also added one more reason as to why they think I'm the perfect guy for the job. I was the one who ended All for One so I should pick up where he left off. As in, I've inherited his status as the top dog in the underworld or something along those lines. It's all a bunch of bs, that's what it is! The thing is, every single one of those lunatics seriously believes in all of this. It's like they received the cult member brainwashing treatment and wholeheartedly believe I'm this evil messiah that will help them conquer the whole world in a week."

"Yeeeeeah, that's bad. Like, really, really bad," winced Kirishima, his body shuddering slightly just at the thought of that nightmarish situation. *"Having a bunch of cult members that worship you like an evil god of some sort constantly trying to get your attention and recruit you to the dark side must suck big time… No wonder you're willing to get married to Todoroki as an attempt to delusion them of this fake perception they have of you. I know I was goofing off earlier during the video call, but seriously, if you need any backup, just say the word. I'll get inside the next flight or train right away and help you take down that whole group in one go."*

"Hah, if it was that easy, I'd have done that myself a long time ago," snorted Bakugou, even though his facial expression softened a whole lot and a small smile crept into his lips. "I'll just keep chipping away at their numbers and arrest them one by one. Then when the right time comes, I'll raid their headquarters and destroy them completely. Not a single one of them will be walking around my streets by the

time I'm done with them, hehehe."

"Geez, this is exactly why they think you're a perfect fit for their imaginary evil overlord," chuckled Kirishima while half-heartedly complaining about his best friend's villain-ish tendencies. *"Anyway, I'm sure you still have plenty of things to do in preparation for tomorrow's courthouse wedding. I'll get in contact with the rest of our former classmates and explain to them what is going on, or else they'll have a massive heart attack once you two publicly announce you tied the knot behind everyone's back."*

"I'm pretty sure Todoroki is also gonna do that with a few of you but yeah, go right ahead and take that annoying task out of my hands," Bakugou requested after letting out yet another tired sigh. "I still have to break this news to my parents and I'm definitely not looking forward to that. Between the old hag and Endeavor, I'd choose Endeavor a hundred times over…"

"I-I wish you the best of luck with that…" awkwardly mumbled Kirishima. He had met and talked with Bakugou's mother before so he had to agree that Todoroki's father was a whole lot less challenging when in comparison. *Huh, now I kinda wonder what it would be like if Todoroki were to meet and interact with Mitsuki-san as Bakugou's husband, fake or otherwise. Oh, to be a fly in the wall if such a meeting ever happens…*

"Yeah, yeah. Bye then," sighed Bakugou with a dismissive roll of his eyes. With that, he ended his phone call with Kirishima, hand holding his smartphone lifelessly flopping down on the sofa's cushion. He stayed just like that for several minutes, his crimson eyes focused on the TV but not actually registering anything due to the thoughts swirling inside of his brain. After a good while, Bakugou let out a long, long sigh. "Well, better do that call now or else I'll wake her up later on…"

……Nah, on second thought, I should finish my dinner first. I will need

that extra energy to deal with my mother and those annoying comments I'm 100% sure she'll make… Ugh, fuck those guys! I swear I'm gonna catch every single one of them for putting me in this sort of position!!!

Chapter 4

Well, that went better than I expected, concluded Todoroki in the back of his mind as he placed his smartphone down on the sofa's cushion.

Actually, several things had gone better than Todoroki was expecting, with the biggest one being Bakugou accepting his proposal for a marriage of convenience between the two of them, but in this specific moment, he was thinking about his conversation with his mother and his siblings.

Much like he had discussed with Bakugou, he decided that it would be for the better if he told the truth not only to his older sister and brother, but also to his mother. Hence, the moment he arrived at his apartment, he began with the phone calls.

The first one was to his older sister, who was initially shocked when Todoroki told her he'd be getting married the following day, but quickly calmed down once she understood it was just an intricate plan to avoid a certain bothersome family tradition of theirs. Nevertheless, Fuyumi felt a bit uncertain about whether Todoroki's plan would really work, given their father's determination to make the arranged marriage happen. According to her, Enji had spent the last two weeks conducting his own research and meeting with several people to compile a comprehensive list of young women around the same age as the youngest Todoroki family member who would be suitable bride candidates. All in all, he meant business when he said it was time for Todoroki to start thinking about his future married status. None of it surprised Todoroki, and he was also very confident he'd be able to win this 'battle' against his father, all the more so now that he had Bakugou as his 'partner'.

The next phone call was to his older brother. Given the later hour, he decided to call his home phone number. To his pleasant surprise, it was his brother's wife who picked up. After exchanging a few pleasantries, she passed the phone to her husband. Todoroki didn't

want to ruin their dinnertime or the rest of their evening, but he had to break the news to his brother now. Just like he had expected, Natsuo was rightfully angry that their father still hadn't learned his lesson and kept on pressing them to participate in the arranged marriage tradition. He had hardly been in contact with Enji since he graduated from college and announced his marriage, but Todoroki could tell through the sound of his voice that Natsuo was seriously considering breaking his low contact status just so he could chew out their father. With some persuasion from both Todoroki and his wife, Natsuo eventually cooled down, though not before he agreed to help Todoroki and Bakugou in any way and shape they might need to fully fool Enji.

Last but definitely not least, it was Rei's, his mother's, turn.

That one was going to be one of the most challenging conversations - not because he feared telling the truth to his mother, but because he didn't want her to feel guilty about this choice he was making. Fortunately, Todoroki was able to express himself properly, lacking vocabulary and exposition sense notwithstanding, and reassured Rei that none of this was her fault. His mother even became more comfortable with that whole plan when she heard a bit more about Bakugou's side of the deal and his current struggles regarding a certain group of villains. By the looks of it, the fact that their fake marriage was a potential solution for two different sets of problems alleviated quite a lot of her guilt. From that point onwards, Rei's biggest worry was the possible repercussions for both of them if it ever came to light that their marriage was a sham. Enji would probably lose his mind about it, which was pretty bad on its own, but the mass media and the public in general would definitely not take it kindly either.

"I guess that's just a risk we'll have to take," was Todoroki's only reply to that concern. He was dead set on seeing it through until the end, and Bakugou was also a relentless perfectionist. Maybe if Todoroki were teaming up with someone else, he'd worry about that damaging possibility a whole lot more. But with Bakugou by his side, he felt like they would be unstoppable, regardless of the circumstances. They were still known as the Top Two even as pro heroes, after all. The

main meaning behind it might have been lost now that they occupied completely different places in the Hero Billboard, but the essence was still right there.

Strangely enough, his mother sounded surprisingly satisfied with such an answer. She even chuckled a little bit at it as they were approaching the end of their phone call.

I'm glad she didn't take this the wrong way. Todoroki sighed in relief, a small smile now present in his usually expressionless face. It seemed that a marriage of convenience with Bakugou truly had been the right approach for this family feud. He now felt twice as relieved with his pick for his fake betrothed.

While Todoroki would have liked to end his day on such a positive note, he still had a few tasks he needed to accomplish before tomorrow's deadline. The moment such a proposal popped up in his mind, he was very keen on following through with it. That's why once he parted ways with Bakugou, which happened shortly after that man he knocked out was taken away by the police, he immediately went to work and started making arrangements, mainly by getting in contact with an acquaintance that might be able to book an appointment for them at the courthouse for the day after. He hadn't had Bakugou's okay yet at that time, but something told him that things would work out in his favour. Hence, Todoroki trusted his gut feeling and went for it without thinking twice.

That was why he received a text message confirming his appointment at the courthouse halfway through his meeting with Bakugou. Had his face not been as expressionless as it was, Todoroki perhaps might have seemed equal parts relieved and excited at seeing that date and time. Two of the biggest hurdles about getting married to Bakugou - getting the actual okay from his 'partner' and getting a last-minute appointment at the courthouse - were swiftly cleared, so of course he was over the moon about it all.

In a roundabout way, he could also think of these past three phone calls as secondary challenges that he needed to undergo to make their plan run more smoothly. However, their impact in the overall plan paled in comparison to Bakugou teaming up with him so readily and without kicking up much of a fuss.

He had heard some bits and pieces about this 'group' of villains bothering Bakugou for a bit over two months now, but only today did he find out the full scope of their harassment. Bakugou briefly filled him in on what had happened so far, and as expected, he could now see why he was willing to accept his fake marriage proposal. While his… well, 'followers', as they could call them, weren't outright dangerous and hadn't done much damage up until now, their attempts at gaining Bakugou's attention were steadily escalating. The encounter Todoroki had witnessed today was considerably tame, and Bakugou had gotten him under control in a matter of seconds, but the previous one had involved a staged bank robbery and placed plenty of civilian lives at risk. From what Bakugou told him, that was the most severe incident they had caused up until now, but the villains involved in it had also been pretty clear that they would keep on trying until Bakugou finally took the mantle as their new 'evil god'. And no, that was not a figure of speech or Bakugou exaggerating. They had indeed called Bakugou their 'god'.

"I bet he's starting to regret having named himself 'Great Explosion Murder God' alongside 'Dynamight'," chuckled Todoroki under his breath. This situation wasn't exactly a laughing matter, but he still found it to be somewhat ironic. Or perhaps he was simply amused by the fact that Bakugou still attracted villains to himself like bees to honey, even as a renowned pro hero with several great accomplishments under his belt since his high school days.

Be that as it may, Todoroki would gladly become his 'scandal' if it helped him in any way. Perhaps the media attention would get them to think twice about approaching him, or maybe the normalcy behind the act of getting married would make his 'followers' realise he's just your regular human being. He knew Bakugou was extremely eager to catch every single member of that group, either way, so he doubted those poor cult members would come out of this unscathed even if

they stopped and apologised.

After hearing Bakugou moan and bitch about it for a good while, Todoroki offered to fill in the rest of their former classmates about their plan, just so they wouldn't be caught off guard by the upcoming public announcement (date still pending).

"I'm sure he's going to talk about this with Kirishima personally, so I can take him, Kaminari and Sero off the list," mumbled Todoroki as he leaned forward and grabbed the notepad and pen he had left on top of the table in front of the sofa. Three names were already scratched off the list he had written in it, and now three more were getting eliminated from it too. He closely observed the remaining names and tried to recall off the top of his head who he remembered seeing around doing their rounds or spotted in the news, just so he wouldn't call anyone that was currently working. "Hmm… I think Midoriya would be a good starting point. He'd also be able to help spread the news to those I can't contact today."

With that in mind, Todoroki grabbed his smartphone from the sofa and browsed through his contact list until he arrived at the right entry. After two rings, he heard that distinct clicking sound of their call connecting.

"Oh, hi, Todoroki-kun. It's pretty unusual for you to call," said Midoriya, his voice as chipper as always. Since they were more accustomed to talking in person or through text messages, he quickly noticed that there was a specific reason why Todoroki needed to get in contact with him right now. *"Is something the matter?"*

"I just want to update you on something about Bakugou and me," calmly explained Todoroki. He initially thought he could go about it in the same way he had with his mother and siblings, but then he remembered that Midoriya was a pro hero like him. There was no need to use terms and words that civilians would understand purposefully; he could just go about it as if he were providing a verbal

report to one of his coworkers.

“Are you and Kacchan going to work together on a new mission?” enthusiastically asked Midoriya, his passion towards pro heroes shining through the tone of his voice. So long as there wasn’t any classified information involved, he was dying to hear all about it.

“We’re getting married tomorrow,” announced Todoroki, his voice as calm and collected as if he were ordering an item from a menu. A second after his announcement, he heard a bunch of crashing sounds coming from the other end of the phone call, which were then followed by total silence. “Midoriya? Hello?”

Todoroki ended up having to patiently wait for a full minute for his friend to return as a whole to their conversation.

“I-I’m sorry, you’re what…!?” nearly yelped Midoriya once he had picked up his smartphone from the floor and had gotten the shaking on his hands under control. *“M-Married? As in, married married? Why- How- What- I…… I had no idea you two were-”*

“We’re teaming up to sort out some problems so we’re not getting married for real, Midoriya,” explained Todoroki before his friend’s mind imploded out of shock. “No, we are getting married for real, but it’s just until we finish our mission. Once that’s done, we’re getting a divorce and everything will go back to how it’s always been.”

“Y-You should have started with that, Todoroki-kun…!!!” Midoriya sobbed, the immense relief he was experiencing turning his voice into something akin to a wail. *“Do you have any idea how big of a shock it is to hear that two of my friends are suddenly getting married to one another? Had you not cleared the misunderstanding so soon, I probably would have collapsed at some point during our conversation!”*

“Sorry,” chuckled Todoroki - even though he did mean his apology. “I’m not sure how I’m supposed to tell other people about it. Not that I can tell it to too many people in the first place. Bakugou and I agreed to share the truth with just our immediate family and everyone from Class A. My father is the only exception to this compromise. He can’t find out about it, or else my plan to decline an arranged marriage will be ruined.”

“An arranged marriage!?” yelped Midoriya, his reaction returning to the same panicked squawking of earlier. *“How did that happen!?”*

“It’s a family tradition in my household, I guess,” sighed Todoroki at the same time he dismissively shrugged his shoulders. “You already know that my parents got married through a Quirk marriage mostly arranged by my grandparents, right? Well, my father wants to continue that tradition, but in the old-fashioned way, as just your normal arranged marriage. You know, like it was done before Quirks existed. He tried to do it with Fuyu-nee and Natsu-nii, but they both managed to find ways to decline it. Now it’s my turn. But since I’m the last chance he’s got to keep that family tradition going, my father is extremely adamant that I get married to one of the women he has selected.”

“And you don’t want to get married to any of them…?” asked Midoriya, even though he already knew what his friend’s answer would be.

“Of course not. I’m against Quirk and arranged marriages equally, family traditions involved or not,” resolutely declared Todoroki. Midoriya had been the first person he had opened up to about his family issues. Had Midoriya not given him a good wake-up call while they were students at U.A., Todoroki had his doubts about whether he would have managed to become the pro hero he is today or not. As such, Midoriya was fully aware of what his thoughts on this topic were. “The problem is that my father isn’t willing to take my no as an answer. You know how he is. He might be on a good path to move forward from the past, but he can be annoyingly stubborn when it

comes to certain issues. Family traditions are definitely one of them."

"So you think that if you marry Kacchan, Endeavor might back off and drop this family tradition for good…" mumbled Midoriya, thinking very closely about what was at stake here. Yes, he definitely couldn't see Todoroki relenting in this big, important subject, given his traumatic past. Making his father think he was already in a loving relationship with someone else could be a good way to cancel all plans he has for an arranged marriage for his youngest son. It would be challenging, seeing as Todoroki was terrible at lying, but if he picked his fake partner very carefully, it was a doable strate- *"Wait, why did you pick Kacchan as your partner in a marriage of convenience!? No, better yet, how exactly did you manage to convince him to participate in this 'mission'!? Kacchan is the last person I'd expect to help you with something like this!"*

"That's because he also needs some help with some of his issues," said Todoroki, trying his best not to chuckle at Midoriya's reaction. He probably also wouldn't have considered Bakugou for the position of his betrothed had he not been in the right place at the right moment - or maybe he would have at some later time after agonising over this family feud for a good, good while, who knew? But now that their plan was in motion, Todoroki was 100% sure he had picked the right person for the job. "He was thinking about fabricating some sort of scandal to shoo away that group that wants to recruit him as the new 'evil boss of the underworld', so I offered to become that scandal. To sum it up, our goals sort of aligned, even though they are completely different, and we agreed to work together to sort out our problems once and for all."

"I see… Yeah, that makes total sense," acknowledged Midoriya while he lightly nodded along. *"Tsukauchi-san mentioned a few days ago that a big slice of Kacchan's latest arrests were members of a certain villain group. Curiously, he has been the only pro hero who has bumped into them, so Kacchan is the only one arresting them, too. If he's willing to get married to you just to get a break from that, things must be getting worse…"*

“Yeah, they are getting worse and more dangerous,” sighed Todoroki, yet again sympathising with the position Bakugou had been forced into. “He told me that the bank robbery and hostage situation he worked on last week was orchestrated by that group as a way to talk to him personally. He described them as ‘a bunch of lunatic followers that got brainwashed into worshipping him as their evil messiah’. I saw one of them today, and yeah, Bakugou’s description is on point. They really do see him as a saviour who will help them conquer the whole world in record time, so long as he joins their side.”

“Ugh… Yeah, that sounds bad…” groaned Midoriya, feeling quite bad for his childhood friend. He had always had a knack for getting involved with villains since they were middle school students, but Midoriya had thought that his bad luck in that regard had cooled down since he had become a pro hero. However, by the looks of it, it seemed Bakugou Katsuki was still the most sought-after villain candidate in Japan, even though he never had any intentions of becoming one… *“I can’t see Kacchan being all that happy about being forced to spend his working hours catching these villains who are trying to headhunt him instead of focusing on more serious matters and missions. No matter what anyone might say about him, Kacchan is the strongest pro hero in the whole country. Putting him in charge of such trivial cases would be a fatal waste of our personnel and resources. Do you two already have a concrete plan on how to deal with that group?”*

“We’re still working on it,” said Todoroki, not confirming or denying it. While he talked extensively earlier with Bakugou, they hadn’t decided anything yet. For the time being, they would be focusing on getting married and announcing it to both Enji and the rest of the country, followed by finding and moving into their new home. Once those two focal tasks had been accomplished, though, Todoroki was sure Bakugou would actively start working on getting rid of the entire group of villains going after him. “We’ll keep all of you updated about how our mission goes, though.”

“Yes, please do! And if you need any help, either with Endeavor or the villain group, let us know too!” added Midoriya, his energetic voice back in full.

Their conversation kept on going for a little while longer, mainly because they took their time splitting their former classmates into two groups - one for Todoroki to contact today and another that Midoriya would be contacting tomorrow, since he'd be off from work then. Once that was done, however, they bid their goodbyes and went on with enforcing the agreed 'divide and conquer' strategy.

Midoriya's reaction was exactly what I expected it to be, chuckled Todoroki in the back of his mind as he browsed through his contact list to look for the phone number of the next name on his notepad. First, he freaked out in a total panic, but he quickly switched to full support once Todoroki explained the true objective of the marriage. He could see the rest of his former classmates having similar reactions, but Midoriya was definitely going to be the most noteworthy one. *I can't blame them, I'd probably react the same way had I been in their shoes.*

"Well, let's move on to the next one. It's starting to get late," sighed Todoroki as he pressed his finger on the contact info of his next 'target'. But just as he was about to tap the call button, a notification popped up in the upper half of his smartphone. "Hm?"

[Bakugou] No matter what, you have to say no. I don't care what you think or what excuse you'll give, YOU WILL SAY NO.

"What?" Seeing such a sudden, cryptic text message, all Todoroki could really do was arch an eyebrow while he stared blankly at the screen. Had Bakugou maybe sent him that message by mistake? …No, that didn't sound like something that would happen to Bakugou, given his perfectionist personality. But if so, then what exactly was he trying to tell him right now?

The answer to that question came a few seconds later, in the shape of a phone number that was trying to call him. Neither he nor his contact

list recognised it.

Chapter 5

“Hello?” said Todoroki with a certain hesitation, even though his voice maintained the same expressionless inflection he used on the daily. A phone call from an unknown number right after receiving such a cryptic text message from Bakugou was giving him a slight foreboding bad feeling. But since he didn’t have any other way to confirm what exactly was going on right now, Todoroki had no choice but to dive right in completely blind.

“Todoroki, right?” asked a woman’s voice, her tone harsh and straight to the point. Todoroki was about to confirm that yes, she was indeed speaking with a Todoroki, and ask her who he was talking with, but he was cut off almost right away. *“Good, that damn rascal didn’t give me a bogus phone number. I guess he lives to see another day after all.”*

“.....” Todoroki would be able to recognise that familiar speaking pattern and mannerisms anywhere in the world. Without even meaning to, he recalled something that Midoriya once said during their first year of high school, shortly after they all moved into the dorm…

“If you think living under the same roof as Kacchan will be a challenge, then you have no idea what it’s like living under the command of Mitsuki-san, his mother… Kacchan will be in his best behaviour for the next three years if it means he can get a small break from that… O-Oh, but not because she’s mean to him or mistreats him in any way! That’s definitely not the case! It’s just… they are too similar to one another, and as his mother… Well, she ends up winning most of the time, ahaha…”

“You’re… Mitsuki-san…?” said Todoroki, more as an uncertain question than an established fact. It had been so long since he last heard Midoriya sharing tales from his childhood with Bakugou and his family that he had his doubts about how well he remembered what he thought he knew.

“Oh, looks like we can skip the introductions,” chuckled Mitsuki, feeling a bit amused about that slow yet on-point reaction. *“I’ll go straight to the point then. How’s your schedule looking for the next couple of days? I’m sure things will be pretty chaotic for a good while, what with the upcoming marriage announcement and you moving in together. But I’m sure you’ll be able to make some time for your future mother-in-law… right?”*

“Um… Since you know about it already, I’m sure Baku- your son has explained to you that it’s just a temporary marriage of convenience,” cautiously explained Todoroki, his back straightening a bit more as he heard the words ‘make some time for your future mother-in-law’ reach his ear. “So it’s not like we’re going to be…”

“Yes, yes, I know it’s all just an act to help you complete some sort of mission or whatever,” sighed Mitsuki, the tone of her voice indicating that she probably had just rolled her eyes at Todoroki - much like Bakugou did whenever he heard something that he found unnecessary. *“But meeting with you sounds like a good, fun way to annoy Katsuki so hey, why not? Plus, wouldn’t that make your fake relationship more believable in the eyes of everyone else? I see it as a win-win deal for all of us, if you ask me, hehehe.”*

Yeah, she’s Bakugou’s mother, alright… Todoroki concluded in the back of his mind, expressionlessly staring into the distance. The apple sure did not fall far from the tree in this specific mother-son duo, it seemed. One of Bakugou’s biggest motivators was the pure, devious desire to mess with other people’s heads, a skill that he most likely inherited from his mother, if Todoroki were to base himself on this conversation alone.

“...I hope you don’t mind me asking this, but… are you sure about this?” asked Todoroki, putting aside his comparison thoughts so he could face this surprise quest with a bit more seriousness. “We’re warning certain people and telling them the truth because it’s the best way to avoid future problems in the short and long run. But we

weren't planning on involving anyone in this 'mission', much less our families…"

"Mission or not, a marriage is a marriage, no matter how long it might last," said Mitsuki after briefly thinking about it for a couple of seconds. *"Even if it's nothing more than a fake marriage, our families will be officially joined through the family register from now on. Call me old-fashioned all you want, but I like to do everything the right way, especially when it comes to my son. I don't plan on getting in the way of your mission or anything, but at least let me enjoy cosplaying as a 'mother-in-law' while I can. I mean, the way that rascal is, I doubt I'll ever be a real mother-in-law. So, you know, I might as well, ahaha."*

"I see," acknowledged Todoroki with a small nod of his head. Although they shared quite a lot of similarities personality-wise, Mitsuki seemed to be more diplomatic than Bakugou, even if it was purely for her personal gain. Todoroki sort of hoped the same also happened to Bakugou as he got older, if only so he wouldn't get into trouble with villains and evil-coded individuals as often as he currently did. But that was beside the point. "So you just want to meet with me to talk and introduce ourselves in person?"

"Pretty much, yes," confirmed Mitsuki in a quite leisurely fashion. *"And I'm not a monster, contrary to what my son might tell you. Katsuki will obviously be there too, whether he wants to or not. He'll throw a hissy fit either way, but it's more interesting to see him getting all pissy with my own two eyes. So once you have a date and time, let me know. My work schedule keeps me in and out of the house all week long, but I'll make it work somehow."*

"Okay, I'll see what I can do," said Todoroki, albeit still feeling indecisive about whether this was the right way to go about it or not. If he could base himself on Bakugou's earlier text message, it was more than clear he wanted Todoroki to say no to his mother. However, that was turning out to be an impossible choice to make.

To begin with, Todoroki didn't want to be rude to either of Bakugou's parents. He fully agreed with Mitsuki when it came to their families being linked to one another the moment the marriage registration papers were signed and processed by the courthouse. Even if it was a fake marriage, the whole process was very much real. Since they were rushing their marriage so much and would be unable to do things the 'old-fashioned' way, the least Todoroki could do was show his respect to his temporary in-laws by humouring them a bit.

Besides, in all honesty, after hearing so much about Bakugou's childhood through Midoriya, Todoroki was slightly curious about his family. He had seen Bakugou with his parents from a distance but had never personally spoken to or interacted with them. If Mitsuki wanted to meet and talk with him despite being fully aware that this was just a temporary marriage of convenience, he wouldn't be against it in the slightest.

"Good, good. I look forward to hearing from you soon," chuckled Mitsuki, ready to end this unexpected phone call now that she had gotten what she wanted. *"Oh, one last thing. Good luck being married to my son. I think you're going to need every little tidbit of it to come out of this unscathed."*

"I lived with him for three years at UA's dorm. I think I'll be just fine," deadpanned Todoroki, his thoughts once again thrown back in time to those messy, busy days when Class 1-A was moving in and settling at the newly built dorm. Back then, too, there had been quite a lot of people who feared living under the same roof as their resident powder keg, to the point his childhood friend had to vouch for their safety.

"Hah! Living with a spouse is a completely different beast from living with a bunch of classmates, you big dolt," snorted Mitsuki, her evil cackling very reminiscent of her son's. *"Like I said, good luck. The way you spoke just now, though, I'm starting to think you'll need a freakin' miracle rather than just good luck. Either way, hang in there until your mission is completed, ahahaha!"*

“Right,” awkwardly replied Todoroki, not really sure what he was supposed to say to such a warning. Maybe Mitsuki was just messing with his head, much like Bakugou liked to do to his friends. Or perhaps she was sharing some tips on how to survive a marriage, as someone who had been married for several decades. Whatever might be the case, Todoroki wasn’t necessarily feeling all that nervous or reticent about getting married and living together with Bakugou. After all, their surroundings might change a little bit, but their relationship would remain the same way it had always been.

So really, how hard could it be to be married to Bakugou Katsuki?

Once they bid their goodbyes and the call ended, Todoroki returned to that text message he had received a few minutes prior. Bakugou hadn’t sent him anything else while he was talking with Mitsuki, so he was probably waiting for some news from either Todoroki or his mother. Should he let Mitsuki do all the talking, or should he tell Bakugou that they would have to meet with his mother sometime soon?

I don’t think he’s going to like the result of our phone call… Maybe I should start doing some damage control before he goes into a hissy fit? Todoroki wondered in the back of his mind as he stared fixedly at his smartphone’s screen. Yes, damage control seemed like a great idea, or else Bakugou would try to get back at him in some sort of way later on - probably by arranging a meeting with Enji as payback or something along those lines. Hence, Todoroki started typing a message back to him.

[Todoroki] Sorry

Would such a short, simple reply work? Todoroki had the impression that throwing around excuses to see if one of them stuck would only aggravate Bakugou even further, but maybe one word was also too-

[Bakugou] I hate you so much, you half-assed moron!

Yeah, fair enough, sighed Todoroki to his own buttons. He, too, was just thinking that a simple 'sorry' might be a bit too half-assed. But there was no need to spout hate remarks just because of something this trivial, right?

[Todoroki] It's okay, Bakugou. I don't mind meeting with your mother

[Bakugou] Well, I mind!

[Todoroki] It's not like it's just going to be me and her. She wants you there too

[Bakugou] THAT'S EXACTLY THE PROBLEM!!!

[Todoroki] How is that a problem?

[Bakugou] Do you want to go on an outing with your father and me? No, you don't. And I don't want either. Now apply that same logic to this and bam, there's that problem I'm talking about!

"But isn't that two completely different things…?" mumbled Todoroki under his breath, his head slightly tilted as he tried to figure out why something like this was a problem for Bakugou. Unlike him, Bakugou seemed to be on good terms with his parents, even though there was so much bickering and banter between him and his mother. He wasn't too privy to their family dynamics, but even Todoroki could tell it was very different from his family. As such, their meeting up with Mitsuki wouldn't be the same experience as meeting up with Enji. "I really

don't get it…"

And since Todoroki didn't get it, he wanted to find a way to do so. He began typing a new text message to Bakugou, but he erased it halfway through. Texting simply wasn't a convenient way to share a back-and-forth conversation with someone else. Hence, Todoroki decided to straight out call Bakugou. It only took one ring for Bakugou to pick up, and Todoroki got on with it right away, leaving his fellow pro hero with no time to start hissing at him.

"I don't understand why you're so against us meeting with your parents," said Todoroki, his head still displaying a hint of a tilt. "It's not like you have a bad relationship with them, right? It should be far easier to interact with them than with my father, and since they know the truth about our upcoming marriage, I think they could be a great way to solidify our fake relationship in the eyes of the public. Plus, my father can't accuse us of faking it when we're going around having meetings with my 'in-laws'."

"Don't call me just because you can't be bothered to type all of that!!!" retorted Bakugou as soon as Todoroki stopped babbling. *"Also, my relationship with my parents has nothing to do with this! I just don't see the point of the two of us meeting with them. Sure, it would help our marriage seem more believable but there's several big ass downsides to it! Downside number one is THAT OLD HAG IS NEVER GONNA LET ME LIVE THIS ONE DOWN! She will spend the rest of her life taking digs at me for this, especially if I never get married after we divorce. So I don't want to give her any more ammunition than this! Downside number two is if those lunatics staged a bank robbery filled with hostages just to talk to me, what do you think they'll do if they learn who my parents are, huh?"*

"Oh. That's true," gasped Todoroki, only now realising that anyone who was connected to Bakugou in any shape or form could potentially be at risk of being approached or outright attacked by the villain group pursuing him. Still, there should be a way to meet with his parents without jeopardising their safety. They were both pro heroes; they knew the ins and outs of protecting witnesses or victims being threatened. "Meeting at a public spot wouldn't be a good idea, then."

“A private spot wouldn’t be much better either,” scoffed Bakugou with a dismissive snigger. *“So let’s forget this whole meeting thing and focus on our actual goals, yeah? Interacting with Endeavor outside of my working hours is as far as I’m willing to go for ‘family time’ throughout this mission. You deal with your side of the family, and I’ll do the same with mine. Anything more than that and I’m out. Understood?”*

“Fine…” sighed Todoroki, feeling a bit peeved at being scolded like a little kid. He was actually looking forward to meeting Bakugou’s mother, but it seemed that was out of the question for the time being. Before fully giving up on it, however, he had one last card up his sleeve to play. “In that case, you should be the one turning her down, not me.”

“.....Fuck.”

I think I just won this one, concluded Todoroki in the back of his mind. That stretched silence, followed by a quick curse word, was very telling of the fact that Todoroki had just turned the tables on Bakugou. He didn’t want to risk destroying that accomplishment by rubbing it in Bakugou’s face, though. He decided to change the conversation to something else as a distraction. “What’s your schedule like tomorrow? Will you be able to make it on time to the courthouse?”

“...So long as those lunatics don’t bother me in the afternoon or some other idiot goes nuclear in my area, it should work out,” grumbled Bakugou, his voice dripping with repressed anger - aka he was sulking big time right now. *“Because of the nature of this so-called ‘mission’, I’ll have to let Best Jeanist know about it too. I’m sure he’ll figure something out to make up for my absence while we’re at the courthouse doing this thing.”*

“Speaking of which. I see you around a lot while I’m working, but I never actually asked you what your usual work schedule is like,” said Todoroki, perking up a bit once that thought popped up in his head.

“Since we’re moving in together and helping each other out with both sides of our deal, maybe it would be a good idea to start sharing our work schedules every week, or maybe even try to match them somewhat.”

“Don’t all hero agencies have similar scheduling styles?” Bakugou pointed out with a dismissive shrug. *“My schedule changes to a different random shift every two weeks, and I get a day off per week. The only exception is when I’m selected to participate in a mission or when an emergency arises. Hmph! This whole country can’t survive without me travelling all over the place, so I might as well say I’m on call 24/7, 365 days a year.”*

“Same as me, then,” chuckled Todoroki as he leisurely leaned his back on the sofa.

Things were far better now compared to a few years ago. The half-destroyed wreck that most big cities had become by the end of the war against the League of Villains had been rebuilt into bustling city centres filled with laughter and peacefulness.

However, pro heroes were still as busy as ever, mostly because their numbers had been cut down so drastically - partially due to the casualties of the gruesome battles, but mostly because of the large number of quitters and ‘heroes’ with less than good intentions that were eventually arrested. The heroes that remained were eventually supplemented by newcomers, like Todoroki, Bakugou and everyone from former Class A, but managing and protecting an entire country with limited numbers meant they could be sent anywhere they were needed at any given time.

“What do you mean, same as you?” scoffed Bakugou, clearly ticked off by something even though all Todoroki had said was four harmless words. *“Since you’re so busy cleaning up after your father’s bullshit and making his transition into retirement as smooth as a baby’s butt, you’re perpetually stuck to this city doing both your job and learning his directly from the source. You’re nothing more than a chained-up guard dog waiting*

to inherit the crown and the throne, so to speak. Heh, you sure have gotten soft, haven't you, Half-and-Half Bastard? Good old you would have kicked up a fuss if daddy dearest even dared to suggest having you work under him. Now, you've fully embraced the nepotism route and are getting an entire hero agency delivered to you on a silver platter. But well, let's give credit where credit is due. At least you still have enough balls to throw him the middle finger when he tries to force you into an arranged marriage. Could have fooled me there, I was starting to think you had been fully castrated by now, hehehe."

"That's not what happened and you know it," Todoroki shot back right away, his gaze tightening even though there was no one around he could expressionlessly glare at. "I'm not doing any of this for him. I'm doing it for myself and for-"

"Yeah, yeah, keep telling yourself that if it helps you sleep better at night." Bakugou wasn't in the right mood to listen to excuses, so he cut Todoroki off right there and then. He also wasn't in the mood to continue chit-chatting on the phone all night long. It was about time he wrapped up this conversation and went about the rest of his night in peace and quiet - a total opposite of what tomorrow would most likely be. *"If you want to convince others your father doesn't have you by the balls, prove it with your actions, not by running away or making excuses. Tsk, no wonder you look like shit some days underneath that whole expressionless thing you have going with your face. If you do what your father wants but fool yourself into thinking you'll do it your way, then you're still doing what your father wants, not what you want, you dense halfwit. I'm giving you fair warning already, but if I see you wandering around our house with that half-dead look on your face, I'm locking you up outside. Ain't no way you're ruining my time off from work with your ugly mug and daddy issues! See you tomorrow!"*

"Wai-" Bakugou had already hung up by the time Todoroki opened his mouth to speak. He could try to call him again but he doubted Bakugou would pick up, pissed off as he was. All Todoroki could do was let out a big, tired sigh, the back of his head pressed flat against the cushy backrest of the sofa, and wait for tomorrow to come.

Contrary to his initial expectations, maybe living together with just Bakugou in a non-school dorm setting was going to be as challenging as others made it sound. After all, he wasn't just the same villain magnet that he had always been.

Bakugou was also weirdly good at seeing through other people with just a single glance at their faces, whether they be a smiling young man oozing with a gallant spirit as he introduced himself or an expressionless pro hero that very few could read like an open book.

Chapter 6

Despite still having half an hour until their scheduled appointment, Todoroki was already standing in front of the courthouse building. No, 'standing' wasn't the right word to describe it. Todoroki was fidgeting around in front of the courthouse, glancing in several directions every couple of seconds.

Because of how badly their phone call had ended the previous night, Todoroki was feeling particularly nervous now. He knew how obstinate and petty Bakugou could be. A small part of him feared that his former classmate's petty side would overpower his strong sense of duty and honour, and mess up their appointment on purpose, just so he could smirk at Todoroki and tell him, 'payback has been served'. The likelihood of it was very small, Todoroki knew that, but underestimating Bakugou was a mistake he never wanted to make.

Hence, there was Todoroki, dressed in regular clothes that would make it easy for him to blend with the crowd and hide his identity. Even though he was usually quite half-assed with disguises, he made sure to put some effort into not being recognised as pro hero Shouto by anyone this time. Todoroki couldn't risk being caught there with Bakugou by anyone before the right time to announce their fake relationship came. He also knew that half-assing things would get Bakugou even more annoyed at him, so he wanted to take all the precautions he could think of.

Standing here waiting for him isn't that good of an idea, but there's nowhere else that gives me such a clear view of the courthouse's surrounding area…, sighed Todoroki in the back of his mind, yet against glancing down at his smartphone. He had no messages or missed calls. Usually, that would be a good sign. Today, that big nothing and the time display ticking away filled him with anxiety. *He's not going to back out at the last minute… right?*

During his quick lunch break, Todoroki checked the news - much like

him, Bakugou was having a very normal, uneventful workday, with no big fights or emergencies to speak of. He, of course, was relieved to hear that. All pro heroes hoped to have boring days while out in the field. But that meant he had too much quiet time on his hands, which he could use to think about their small squabble.

Todoroki kept replaying their conversation again and again, trying to figure out if he had said something that had set off Bakugou or if his fellow pro hero was simply feeling more snappy than usual due to his current circumstances. Seeing as this was a matter that involved him (someone who was chronically dense) and Bakugou (someone who was chronically in a mad mood), either of those possibilities was very likely. Maybe it was even a mixture of both. Maybe for someone who was dealing with an increasingly more erratic and dangerous villain group, Todoroki's family issues and feuds seemed so very trivial and inconsequential in comparison - so much so, this eagerness Todoroki felt about rushing their marriage of convenience ended up getting on Bakugou's nerves.

It's not like I can explain why I feel this need to get officially married to him as soon as possible, Todoroki sighed yet again while stuffing his smartphone into his pocket. He himself did not understand why he had this nagging gut feeling. All Todoroki knew was that every single cell in his body was telling him to do it and fast.

His father seemed to be quite serious about keeping that family tradition alive, but Todoroki knew Enji didn't have it in him to force him to get married to someone. He'd keep pestering him to do it at every opportunity, give him list after list of potential bride candidates that were willing to marry into their family, perhaps even host some sort of party or event to personally introduce Todoroki to some of those young ladies. But Todoroki doubted that Enji would take more extreme measures to forcibly get what he wanted.

Given that there was no incoming danger to himself, Todoroki couldn't explain that gut feeling even if someone asked him to. That alone probably rubbed Bakugou the wrong way, but what else could he do? Todoroki couldn't justify what he couldn't even rationalise. He

could, however, try to tell him exactly this. Even if an 'I don't know' confused Bakugou even further, it was better than total silence. Better yet, maybe Bakugou would help him figure it out, since he was so good at reading Todoroki's expressionlessness and denseness.

"Yeah, I'll talk to Bakugou about it once we're done with the marriage registry…" mumbled Todoroki to himself, the tension and his fidgetiness making him glance at his smartphone for the millionth time. He nearly felt like groaning when he noticed that not even two minutes had passed since he last checked it.

"Talk about what now?"

The voice that came right from behind Todoroki made him snap his body straight, as if he were a little kid who had been caught with his hand in the cookie jar despite having been told not to snack before mealtime.

"B-Bakugou…" When Todoroki turned around, he saw there the man whom he had been not-so-patiently waiting for. They seemed to be approaching this new phase of their 'mission' with the same methods, as Bakugou was also dressed in casual wear meant to disguise his appearance. It was currently the middle of the summer, so hats and sunglasses were normal accessories that no one would think about twice. When side by side, they simply looked like regular young men enjoying a day off from work. For some reason, and despite his earlier nervousness, seeing Bakugou here like this came as a big relief for Todoroki. "You made it in time…"

"I told you I'd make it so long as no moron wrecked havoc in my territory, right?" scoffed Bakugou with a dismissive shrug of his shoulders. He stuffed his hands in his pants' pockets and started walking towards the courthouse. "Let's get this done once and for all. It's better to show up a few minutes early for this sort of stuff."

“Okay,” said Todoroki, promptly following after Bakugou. So the deal they had made ended up winning over Bakugou’s begrudging pettiness. Such a thought was making Todoroki reevaluate his earlier conclusions: maybe what had happened last night wasn’t actually an argument but just Bakugou scolding him due to something he didn’t like or agree with? Yes, that was going to be the first thing he asked Bakugou as soon as he had the chance.

The street where the courthouse was located was a main artery of the city, filled with several other government-related buildings and several company headquarters, making it a very crowded area during weekdays. Since everyone who was outside had places to be and was in a hurry, no one could really afford to pay attention to the people they passed by. Inside the courthouse, however, it was a different story.

The entrance was being closely guarded by a handful of police officers, who stood there all day long for the sake of the public servants and clerks working in the building. Normally, anyone who went inside needed to go through a security screening, but they both managed to bypass it by showing their hero licenses to the officers. Todoroki was the one who arranged their appointment through his private contacts; hence, it was his name that was used to book their last-minute appointment.

Shortly after they arrived at a waiting room bustling with people from every walk of life, a clerk came to meet with them and led them to a different waiting area. The room they were taken to was much smaller and more private, located in an area that would provide all the discretion and security that individuals with a considerable public standing and popularity required. No one needed to know what two pro heroes were doing at a courthouse, something both Todoroki and Bakugou were fully onboard with, given the sensitive ‘mission’ they had on their hands.

“So? What exactly did you want to talk about?” asked Bakugou as soon as he dropped his body on one of the available armchairs. He went to check the time on his phone, and since they still had a

handful of minutes until their appointment, he decided to get on with one of the entries in his mental tasks list.

“Oh. Um… It can wait until we’re done here,” said Todoroki, slightly caught by surprise by Bakugou’s straightforward question. He, too, took a seat in a nearby armchair, intending to quietly wait for them to get called to the office of the judge who would be officiating their civil marriage. The suspicious glare on Bakugou’s face told him such a thing was not an option, however. Todoroki sighed. “It’s about the argument we had yesterday on the phone.”

“What argument? I just said the truth as I see it,” scoffed Bakugou, turning his face in the opposite direction with a moody ‘hmph’. “If you’ve got a problem with that, keep it to yourself. I ain’t gonna censure myself to protect your fragile little feelings.”

“No, that’s not what I…” Todoroki’s words stopped mid-sentence, his eyebrow slightly perked up as he closely looked at Bakugou. Could it be that Bakugou didn’t even view what happened yesterday as an argument? In that case, he must not be that angry about anything that Todoroki might or might not have said. “If you’re not bothered by it, then good. I just didn’t want things to be too tense between us, especially now that we’re going to move in together.”

“Pick a side to be on, will ya?” tiredly sighed Bakugou while he rolled his eyes around. By the time his eyeballs returned to their primary position, he was looking at Todoroki yet again. “You can either be dense as fuck or stupidly hypersensitive of other people. Don’t zigzag from one to the other whenever you feel like it.”

“You’re asking for the impossible, Bakugou,” deadpaned Todoroki, despite feeling a whole lot more relaxed now that he was talking and bickering with Bakugou like usual. *I guess I was overthinking it too much.*

“So long as you stay in your lane and don’t disrupt my life too much, we’ll be just fine. Didn’t we coexist without any problem when we were living in the dorm?” pointed out Bakugou, dismissively waving his hand around. It was now his turn to arch an eyebrow when he spotted Todoroki blankly staring at him. “What?”

“I said the same thing yesterday to Mitsuki-san, and she gave me an earful about how living with a spouse is different from living in a dorm with multiple classmates,” calmly stated Todoroki, a big contrast to Bakugou’s crumbling disparaging attitude. “She also said we’ll get in trouble if we keep thinking of it this way… or something along those lines.”

“Huh!? What is that even supposed to mean!?” yelped Bakugou, promptly jumping up from the armchair.

“I’m not sure myself,” said Todoroki, his head tilted as he did his best to recall every single word used in his brief conversation with his ‘mother-in-law’. Even now, he felt very puzzled about that portion of their talk, be it because of its contents, be it because of Mitsuki’s unknown true intentions. “You should ask her about it the next time you talk with her. We’re going to deal with our families separately from now on, right? It’s up to you to figure that one out, then.”

“Grrr…” Bakugou sat back down on the airchair while growling and grumbling under his breath, his arms crossed over his chest. “...Is verbal warfare one of the skills you’ve been learning from Endeavor these past few years?”

“No, not really,” denied Todoroki with a small shake of his head. His blank gaze was still focused on Bakugou, but it was now slightly hardened due to the mention of his father. “If you ask me, you’re a far better example and teacher when it comes to tricking people and messing with their heads through the power of words.”

“It’s way too late to try to butter me up with compliments…” retorted Bakugou, not falling for the surface-level flattery being used to soften the sharp edges of his remarks.

“Is it working, though?” asked Todoroki, quickly catching onto the fact that Bakugou’s retaliation was far tamer than it would have been under normal circumstances.

“Hah! You mean you buttering me up with compliments or you tricking people through the power of words?” snorted Bakugou, his lips slowly twisting themselves into a knowing smirk. He placed his elbow on the armrest and leaned the side of his face on his closed fist, his expression a mixture of mocking and pleased. “I’ll give you a gold star for effort, but overall, nope. But keep on thinking you screwed me over with this ‘dealing with our families separately’ thing. It makes it easier for me to make a move behind your back, hehehe.”

“Thanks for the warning,” deadpanned Todoroki, making a mental note to keep an eye out for Bakugou’s petty acts of revenge and evil schemes for the next couple of weeks.

“Don’t thank me, the warning is part of the plan,” snickered Bakugou, his smirk only growing more conspicuous and malicious. His crimson eyes were quite literally twinkling with mischief.

“……” What was Todoroki even supposed to say to something like that? Bakugou was truly a challenging opponent, both in physical fights and verbal battles. It made Todoroki value those rare instances where he scored a point or two against him even more. He would need to be on his toes until Bakugou cooled down and placed this conversation on the back burner. Meanwhile, all Todoroki could do was appease and distract him in hopes of being hit by just a bump in the road rather than a nuke. “Speaking of which, when should we announce our marriage and begin the preparations to move in together?”

“You’ve been steamrolling the whole marriage process because of your fussiness over it. I’m gonna do the same with our new place,” declared Bakugou, his smirk instantly turning into a serious frown. “Just like you have your contacts inside the courthouse, I know my way around real estate. I’ll find something that meets my high standards in a matter of hours, just like I did with my current apartment. All you need to do is pack your stuff and bring it to the right address once that’s done.”

“Okay,” said Todoroki with a quick nod. That sure made things easier for him, even though he still had to deal with the whole process of breaking his lease earlier than planned. He used his apartment mainly to sleep and store his clothes and other personal belongings; the packing wouldn’t take more than half a day, at best. As for his furniture, he’ll ask his landlord if they want to buy it from him and keep the apartment partially furnished for the next renter. If not, he’d sell what he could and put the rest in a rented storage unit. However, his lifestyle was very different from Bakugou’s, which led him to ask next, “Will you need help packing and moving your stuff? I know you have a lot more stuff than I do, since you have cooking as your hobby.”

“It’s not a hobby, it’s a life skill and a necessity to keep my high performance while I’m outside doing my job!” retorted Bakugou, his crimson eyes tightening into a glare. “Just because you survive on takeout doesn’t mean everyone else is dumb enough to slack on maintenance of their main work tool.”

“I eat my mother’s and sister’s home cooking more frequently than takeout,” rectified Todoroki, feeling that he needed to seriously defend himself on this particular topic. He would not allow Bakugou to place his mother’s and sister’s delicious meals on the same level as commercial food. “If you were in contact with them, I’m sure they’d share more recipes with you. You still use Fuyu-nee’s mapo tofu recipe, don’t you?”

“I’m not gonna fall for your cheap tricks, just give it a rest already, will you!?” hissed Bakugou, slamming his closed fist on the armrest.

“Tsk…” Todoroki unconsciously clicked his tongue and averted Bakugou’s all-seeing gaze. He really was good at reading between the lines. It seemed he truly had no choice but to back off for the time being. Maybe once they were peacefully living together, Todoroki would be able to revisit this topic. But for now, sadly, he would not be able to grant Mitsuki’s wish to ‘cosplay as a mother-in-law’...

“Seriously, you’re so damn stubborn…” mumbled Bakugou under his breath, cautiously studying Todoroki’s expressionless demeanour to discern whether there was still more coming or if he was ready to give up on pointless family interactions for good. While he could understand - and maybe even sympathise a tiny, tiny little bit with - Todoroki’s child-like desire to have a close-knit family, this was nothing more than a temporary sham. Why go through the trouble of keeping their fake relationship going even while behind closed doors? “Just so we’re clear, you picked me for this ‘mission’ not only because we’re both getting something out of it, but also because there won’t be any trouble afterwards once we ‘break up’ and get a divorce. Don’t you dare forget this is purely a business transaction, so to speak.”

“...? Yeah, I know that,” said Todoroki, a bit confused about why Bakugou was bringing up something they had agreed on right from the start. He was about to ask him if he had any issues or doubts about it, but was interrupted by the entrance of the same clerk who had brought them to that private waiting room.

It was time for their appointment with a judge working on the civil registry.

The clerk took them to a small but comfortable office room, decorated with just a desk, enough chairs for both the public servant members and the visitors, a few bookshelves filled with books and other knick-knacks, and two tall filing cabinets, each drawer locked by key. All in

all, it was your boring, bland corporate office that would drive anyone insane after spending a lifetime stressing over paperwork and bureaucracy in it.

The judge Todoroki had booked an appointment with was a tired-looking man in his mid-30s, albeit the dark circles under his eyes made him look nearly twice that age. He greeted them very dryly but still gestured to the chairs on the opposite side of the desk to invite them to take a seat.

“What can I help you with today?” The judge asked, picking up a pen from his desk in preparation to take any notes that may be needed.

“We want to get married,” declared Todoroki, his back as straight as an arrow as he sat down very politely. Bakugou, on the other hand, was a whole lot more relaxed and uninterested in acting like a teacher’s pet while occupying the chair next to him.

“I need you to fill in this marriage registration form,” explained the judge, grabbing a small stack of papers from one of the drawers on the desk. He passed them over to Todoroki alongside a pen. “Do you want us to update your family register at the city hall for an extra fee, or do you want to do it yourselves in person?”

“Yes, we’d appreciate it if you could do the update for us,” requested Todoroki, exchanging a quick glance with Bakugou. They were both busy people, with a work schedule that changed constantly. If there was a way to make the paperwork less time-consuming, they would go for it, even if it cost them more.

“Very well. If you have any questions about that form, don’t hesitate to ask,” said the judge, returning his attention to his computer to initiate his own side of the paperwork. “Meanwhile, I’ll need both of your birth certificates and proof of address.”

Both Todoroki and Bakugou had done their ‘homework’ beforehand and came prepared with the needed documents and personal information. The previous night, as Bakugou was getting ready for the following day, right before going to bed, he wondered if he should send a text message to Todoroki to remind him to bring the required documents. But then he remembered who he was getting married to. Unlike his idiotic friends, who needed to be babied by someone with a brain to not mess up any official procedure, Todoroki was actually an honour student with a good (albeit dense) head on his shoulders. Bakugou was sure he’d know what to do without any reminders, since he was so keen on getting married as soon as possible. This moment right here proved that Bakugou’s presumption had been correct.

‘Guess I can just sit back and let him deal with the pain-in-the-ass paperwork, concluded Bakugou in the back of his mind, glancing over at Todoroki (who was currently focusing on filling in the form) with the disinterest of someone watching paint dry. The marriage side of their deal was more to Todoroki’s benefit than his own, so in all honesty, Bakugou couldn’t care less about how it was done and the little details that went into it. All he wanted was a helpful scandal that didn’t besmirch his pro hero name and reputation. That was the main and only reason why he was letting Todoroki do as he pleased - within reason, of course. *So long as we’re done here within a reasonable time, I should still be able to do a couple more hours out in the field. I did all of my reports in the morning and helped some of the sidekicks after my lunch break. That means Best Jeanist can’t get on my case if I do a bit of recon work while doing my rounds in the afternoon. ‘Gotta start smoking those lunatics out in preparation to raid their stupid headquar-* “W-Wai- Hold your fuckin’ horses right there!!!”

Multitasking was one of the many prized skills Bakugou had long mastered; hence, it was quite easy for him to be planning out the rest of his day in his mind while he followed along from a distance the stuff that Todoroki was writing down on the marriage registration form. The moment he saw Todoroki scribbling the wrong kanji character in the wrong spot, Bakugou immediately jumped into action and snatched that sheet of paper from the table.

“‘The hell are you doing!? I’m keeping my name as it is!” hissed Bakugou, dividing his glaring between the half-filled form and the moron who had just messed it up and would have to start it anew. “Don’t unilaterally decide to give someone else a new family name!”

“But isn’t this the easiest way?” pointed Todoroki, the look on his expressionless face so innocent you’d think Bakugou was the one being unreasonable in this instance.

“How!?” Bakugou nearly growled, his glaring eyes tightening even more into a thin slit. His body language and overall aura were pretty much daring Todoroki to find a good explanation for this personal attack on his being.

“It’s a compromise,” said Todoroki very matter-of-factly, already motioning his hand towards the paper that had been stolen away from him. “Since his family name will be carried on this way, my father will lose half of the reasons why he could be against our marriage. Which means less time arguing back and forth with him for me and less time off from work needed to be wasted on ‘family time’ for you. So, again, this is the path of least resistance for everyone involved.”

……*Damn it, he got me good with this one……,* grumbled Bakugou in the back of his mind, grinding his teeth with repressed anger as Todoroki took the form from him. He crossed his arms over his chest, angrily leaned back on the chair, turned his head away, and, at long last, mumbled in a very sulky manner, “Fine… But you better be ready to deal with the consequences…”

Consequences of what?, inwardly wondered Todoroki, hesitating just the slightest as he kept looking at Bakugou. The only thing he could think of was the consequences of putting Bakugou in yet another bad mood and the payback he could expect to receive for it in the near future. But that was just par for the course for them, not something Todoroki needed to be scared of. *I’ll just let him do whatever he wants with our new home. That should get us on even ground and put him in a*

better mood later on.

With that matter (sort of) settled, Todoroki proceeded with filling in the rest of the marriage registration form, every now and then asking some questions to Bakugou whenever he bumped into a piece of information about him that he did not possess. Fortunately, the judge responsible for their case did not even blink an eye at Todoroki's lack of knowledge on the person he was getting married to - after all, nothing made someone lose faith in love and the sanctity of marriage better than spending years on end witnessing in person the mess that certain couples were about to bring about to their own lives.

"Okay, I think that's it," announced Todoroki as he closed the pen he had been using. He picked up the thin stack of papers and motioned them towards Bakugou. "Do you want to double-check them?"

"I want to tear them apart and burn their remains into ashes, that's what I want…" grumbled Bakugou with a very sour voice. He yanked the marriage registration form from Todoroki's hand and silently skimmed through each page, making sure there was no mistake or error that they would need to correct later on. Nothing pissed him off more than seeing half of his name being butchered into something else entirely, but he held his tongue and slapped the papers on top of the desk. Both Todoroki and the judge interpreted that as a sign that there were no problems with the form.

"The last thing I need from you is to sign or stamp both the original form and this copy here," explained the judge after making a photocopy of every single page of the marriage registration form. "The copy will be staying in our archives, while the original form will be sent to the city hall that covers the area where your main address is located."

"Is it possible for us to also take a copy home with us?" asked Todoroki, grabbing both the original and the copy in preparation to do as requested. "We'll definitely need one as soon as possible.

Preferably today.”

“Yes, I can get an extra copy done once you’re done signing the papers,” acknowledged the judge with a slow, tired nod. “It will take a couple of business days for your family registry to be updated. You’ll receive a letter to the address you wrote down once the process is completed. Also, due to the name change, I advise you to update your personal information everywhere else once the letter arrives, including banks, health insurance, driver’s license, workplace, and so on.”

“Great, more work for me…” begrudgingly mumbled Bakugou under his breath as he also did his thing and signed both versions of the form.

“With this, you are now officially married,” announced the judge as he, too, signed both marriage registration forms. He took the original and once again put it in the printer to get that extra copy his clients had requested. “Do you have any questions or need any other service provided by the courthouse?”

“No, this is all,” said Todoroki as he got up from his seat. He took the extra copy of the marriage registration form and offered a quick bow at the judge, as a thank you for not only doing the whole process so professionally and fast, but also for accepting their last-minute appointment.

Todoroki then glanced at the handful of papers he was holding - the physical proof that he was now a married man and, hence, had successfully managed to ruin his father’s plans for an arranged marriage with who knows who.

I guess Bakugou and I are really married now . Such were Todoroki’s thoughts as he and his fake spouse left the small office room and walked the same corridor until the private waiting room, from where

they were then escorted to the same entrance they had passed through upon their arrival at the courthouse once they were done paying their dues and the extra fee. Even though they had been constantly talking about it for a while now, it still felt slightly unreal that they had truly done such a crazy thing in the space of a day. *Had it not been for this unofficial 'mission', right now I wouldn't be walking outside of the courthouse with a copy of our signed marriage registration form… Thinking about our marriage of convenience that way makes it feel a bit weird, though. I bet Bakugou must also be feeling this strange but not necessarily bad sensation about all of this…*

"Alright, now that this part is done, it's time we focus on setting up the remaining groundwork to make this mission a complete success," casually instructed Bakugou as he put his hat and sunglasses back on, now that they were out in public once again. He also took a glance at his smartphone, both to check the time and to see if no one had been bombarding him with phone calls and text messages. Close to an hour had gone by since he excused himself halfway through his work shift, but it seemed the pro heroes and sidekicks he worked with every day were being more than enough to cover for his and Todoroki's absence, seeing as there were no requests for backup. Disguise on, he turned his attention to Todoroki, who was blankly staring at him rather than covering up his easily recognisable identity. "What now?"

"You're acting surprisingly calm and rational about this," deadpanned Todoroki, finally putting on his hat to partially hide his scarred face. Since Bakugou had been switching back and forth between normal moody and sulking moody, Todoroki was expecting to hear him ranting and complaining about their married status the moment they stepped outside of the courthouse. But instead, Bakugou was promptly getting ready to commence the next step of their mission.

"I knew what I was getting into the moment I accepted teaming up with you, okay!?" hissed Bakugou, a frown instantly appearing on his face. He gave a light kick to Todoroki's shin and then kept on walking. "Yeah, this pisses me off immensely, but even I know this is better than either doing nothing or slowly hunting those lunatics down one by one for the rest of my pro hero career. I'd rather redirect all of my pent-up frustration and resentment into reaching our goal as soon as

possible than waste my time yapping about the methods we use."

"Makes sense," acknowledged Todoroki with a small nod. It was a good sign that Bakugou wasn't pissed off to the point he'd be willing to self-sabotage their deal. Plus, he seemed to be raring to continue building the needed groundwork, much like he had said. That suited Todoroki just fine, as he had long decided what was the first thing they needed to do once they had signed their marriage registration. "In that case, let's go."

"Huh? Let's go where?" asked Bakugou, so confused about suddenly having his hand grabbed and then pulled along that he inadvertently allowed it to happen in the first place.

"To my hero agency," declared Todoroki, already eyeing an empty taxi parked near the entrance of the courthouse. "Since we have this extra copy with us, we might as well strike fast and suddenly."

"...Huh?" blurted out Bakugou, his mouth hanging wide open for a couple of seconds as his brain processed those stupefying sentences. This exact same thing had repeated itself so many times in the past 24 hours that Bakugou was compelled to screech in a half-hearted panic, "WHY ARE YOU ALWAYS LIKE THIS!?"

Chapter 7

Seriously, what's with him and this crazy pace…? Bakugou grumbled in the back of his mind, his crimson eyes staring out the window of the moving taxi. *I get that laying out a good foundation right from the get-go is the best way to go about it, but isn't his timeline ridiculously fast?*

No matter how much Bakugou thought about it, he still couldn't understand what exactly was making Todoroki this desperate. It wasn't as if Enji would physically force him to get married to a woman of his choosing - if anything, he was being quite diplomatic by allowing Todoroki to be the one picking a wife from the big 'bride catalogue' he had been creating. That gave Todoroki more than enough time to stall the arranged marriage and work on an appropriate, timely solution with Bakugou.

But no, instead, Todoroki was speeding through it all as if he wanted to break the Guinness World Record for fastest marriage.

Is stress scrambling with his brain or something? Or is he doing all of this out of spite because of what I told him last night? , inwardly sighed Bakugou, turning his gaze towards Todoroki, who was sitting next to him on the backseat, right after having spotted Endeavor's Hero Agency - a tall skyscraper with endless floors and a considerably modern build for a hardcore traditionalist like Enji. Bakugou was quite familiar with the hero agency and knew its inner structure like the back of his hand, thanks to all the time he spent there during his internships. *Ugh, who would have thought I'd one day come here for the express purpose of slapping the big boss in the face with a marriage certificate binding me to his son…? Damn it, I can already tell this is gonna be a huge pain in the ass…*

"Hey, Half-and-Half Bastard," called Bakugou as the taxi came to a stop next to the sidewalk. Todoroki promptly turned his face towards him, even as he grabbed his wallet to pay for the taxi ride. "Before we go in there and cause a freakin' ruckus, we better work out some stuff

first or else you can kiss goodbye to this whole ‘mission’.”

“Work out some stuff?” repeated Todoroki, his head slightly tilted. He gave the taxi driver the money requested, accepted the leftover change and then got out of the vehicle before he dived deeper into Bakugou’s foreshadowing words. “What is it that we need to work out?”

“A proper story to back up our ‘relationship’, obviously,” groaned Bakugou while rolling his eyes at the scatterbrained idiot he was now married to. “I bet Endeavor is gonna interrogate us once we tell him we got married, so we better come up with a plausible story to explain it. He’s not dumb, even if he can be almost as dense as you at times. He will know this whole thing is a sham if we can’t immediately answer his questions about us.”

“Oh. Right. That’s true,” said Todoroki, his body language perking up a little bit at it, despite his face remaining as passive as always. That was something he hadn’t given much thought to, but he could tell that Bakugou was on to something by bringing it up. He, too, knew that his father would relentlessly ask them question after question, not only to intimidate them but also to catch them lying red-handed. “So we need to give our fake relationship a proper background, just like in an infiltration or spy mission.”

“Exactly,” acknowledged Bakugou, so very thankful that Todoroki was so quick on the uptake. Rather than cross the street to reach the hero agency, he gave a quick jerk with his chin to gesture towards a nearby sidestreet, where they could take their time coming up with a good ‘love story’ to themselves without arousing the suspicion of any heroes and sidekicks currently working inside or around the building. After making sure the coast was clear, Bakugou leaned his back against the wall, grabbed his smartphone and opened a notes app. “Alright, let’s get this shit all planned out before something or *someone* dooms us. I’ll also be sending this to our morons, just to make sure they don’t accidentally blow our cover by saying something contradictory to the story we’re using.”

“Oh. That’s another great idea,” acknowledged Todoroki, nodding along to Bakugou’s stellar reasoning. He also hadn’t given much thought to their former classmates and how they would surely get swarmed by curious journalists and reporters dying to hear more information on Shouto’s and Dynamight’s relationship once they went public with their marriage. “When should we say we started dating?”

“The most convenient date for me would be shortly after we graduated from UA. That would explain why I’ve been keeping my private life a total secret right from the start,” pointed out Bakugou, already typing on the notes app. “That means… April. Pick a day. Any day except April Fool’s, obviously.”

“April 10th, then,” chose Todoroki after giving it a bit of thought. April would be easy to memorise, seeing as their pick for a month had a good explanation behind it. To aid him in remembering the day, he decided to use his own birthday as a mnemonic - he was born on the 11th, so he subtracted a day from that to use as their dating anniversary.

“Alright, what more do we need to know?” wondered Bakugou out loud as he added the day to his notes. “What kind of questions do you think Endeavor will ask us?”

“Hmm… Maybe about where we’ve been going out on dates?” suggested Todoroki, once again delving deep into thought. He didn’t have any dating experience, so he was having a hard time coming up with the sort of questions someone would ask a couple to learn more about their relationship. His father, however, was a married man. Todoroki doubted he’d struggle to interrogate them like two criminals about to be sent to prison. “Also, if we know things about one another, like what we like and such.”

“I often go hiking and mountain climbing on my days off whenever

my work schedule allows it. Can't ask for a better explanation why we have never been caught outside together," Bakugou casually said with a shrug. "I'm not the type that takes photos everywhere I go, so sorry, he's gonna have to trust us on this one."

"Got it," acknowledged Todoroki with a quick nod. He had no idea Bakugou was into that sort of thing, but it somehow seemed to match him perfectly. Todoroki did remember him being the most experienced and knowledgeable when he, Bakugou, Midoriya, Iida, Kirishima, Kaminari and Sero went camping on a snow-covered mountain as a part of their UA hero training. Now he had concrete evidence as to why. "Um… Do you have a favourite food? Aside from spicy food, that is. Mine is cold soba, as you know."

"I'm not picky, anything spicy goes," declared Bakugou without a care. This portion wasn't necessary to the 'love story' script that needed to be shared with their former classmates; as such, he didn't write this last one down in his notes. "In case the old hag didn't mention it when she needlessly called you, her first name is Mitsuki, and my old man's name is Masaru… I don't have any siblings…"

"Yeah, that I already knew, save for your father's name," chuckled Todoroki, a bit amused at the bitterness in Bakugou's voice as he brought up his mother's insistence on talking with the man he was about to marry, even if just temporarily. "Oh, where do you live?"

"If you give it a tiny little bit of thought, you'll figure it out. And don't worry, I know where you live, so that covers that particular base," remarked Bakugou as he jotted down some possible questions that might also occur during the big confrontation - whether it be with Enji or when making their relationship public. "You were the one all gung-ho about getting married, so we'll just keep you as the one who proposed. I mean, you *were* the one who suddenly dropped a 'Will you marry me?' in such a random way that I thought you were about to die on me from a brain bleed or some shit like that."

“Okay…?” said Todoroki, more in the shape of a question than a confirmation. He was still far too preoccupied with trying to figure out the answer to Bakugou’s previous cryptic words. He had absolutely no idea where he lived; he had never been invited there or had a reason to visit on his own initiative. It went without saying that he had also never discussed Bakugou’s living arrangement with any of his friends or former classmates. So why would Bakugou tell him he could figure it out if he thought about it? The city they lived in was pretty big; there was no way he would be able to narrow it down to a specific address on his own when not even the paparazzi that had made following Bakugou and uncovering all his ‘dark secrets’ their life mission had managed to squeeze any information from him since the day they went pro.

“As for the rest… well, I guess we’ll just have to improvise on the go,” sighed Bakugou as he saved everything he had written down on the notes app and locked his smartphone. “Since we’re doing all of this so suddenly and in such a rushed way, we haven’t had the time to finalise anything aside from getting officially married. The details of where we’ll be moving in together and so on will have to wait. You better not come to me to complain if your precious father tries to sabotage our moving progress with some sort of underhanded trick or last-minute mission, you hear me?”

“Don’t worry, I already have the perfect counterattack if he tries to be against us moving in together,” reassured Todoroki with an expressionless thumbs-up, something that came off as weirdly goofy but also slightly endearing. “Just like we agreed earlier, send me the address once you find an apartment to your liking, and I’ll be ready to move in the next day.”

“...What kind of counterattack? You having some sort of plan ready to be used beforehand is giving me a really bad feeling…” grumbled Bakugou with a certain hesitation, his gaze tightening into a suspicious scowl. The last time Todoroki made plans in a unilateral manner, they ended up in an unofficial mission that could have been used as the main theme for a comedy TV show. To say Bakugou already had warning bells ringing inside of his cranium would be an understatement…

“It’s nothing too problematic,” deadpanned Todoroki, his sixth sense telling him that Bakugou had totally misunderstood the essence of his ‘counterattack plan’. “I told my mother we’d be moving in together once we got married, and she immediately brought up the possibility of my father making a stink out of it. But she told me she’d scold him if he got in our way and to just proceed as normal.”

“Pfffft…!” Not having expected that sort of ‘counterattack’ in the slightest, Bakugou sputtered into laughter almost as soon as those words were out of Todoroki’s mouth. “So you asked mommy to come to your rescue? Fuckin’ hell, you are such a spoiled little prince, ain’t you? Pathetic, ahahaha!”

“Would you rather I ask Mitsuki-san to have a conversation with him?” Todoroki retorted back, sulking just a little for being made fun of this blatantly.

“Are you trying to start World War III or maybe even the war to end all wars!?” yelped Bakugou, his facial expression making a 180 from mocking to sickly pale. “That’s such a bad idea, I don’t even know how the heck such a thing crossed your mind!”

“I’ll move forward with my initial counterattack plan if needed, then,” announced Todoroki with a quick shrug of his shoulders, his face twice as expressionless. He was starting to notice a certain trend about Bakugou - he more easily backed down whenever his mother was mentioned in some way. For the sake of his own peace of mind and safety, Todoroki made sure to neatly store that information in his brain. *My only problem with it might be knowing how much I can push before Bakugou goes ballistic on me. I should keep an eye out for that before I accidentally set him off…*

“Tsk! Let’s just hurry up and get this done once and for all, so I can finally return to work before my shift is over!” grumbled Bakugou, his

frowning face even more rugged and sulky. He angrily stomped out of the side street and made a direct beeline to Endeavor's hero agency.

"Since you want us to take care of our own families separately, I'll try my best to do most of the talking with my father," said Todoroki after a small sigh and while running after Bakugou to catch up with him. "All you need to do is play along and not start a fight if my father starts rubbing you the wrong way."

"I've worked under or with him enough times to know how to deal with his abrasive personality, thank you very much," scoffed Bakugou, not taking those pieces of advice all that kindly. He was picked for this 'fake marriage mission' precisely because he could easily deal with the pro hero Endeavor. As far as Bakugou was concerned, this conversation was going to be a pain in the ass but also extremely easy, so long as no one ruined it with careless remarks. "Make sure you think twice before you open your big mouth and babble about the wrong thing."

"I know," acknowledged Todoroki while resolutely nodding at Bakugou. He might not look like it, given his perpetual blank demeanour, but he was taking this as seriously as he took his job as a pro hero. He would not risk making a mistake that destroyed all the progress they had made these last two days.

With all of that in mind, the two of them made their way into Endeavor's Hero Agency. The entrance/lobby area was bustling with people, from sidekicks doing their jobs to civilians who were making reports or placing requests for help from pro heroes. Todoroki worked there, so he was used to all of that, but even Bakugou recognised quite a lot of familiar faces amongst the staff members.

"Well, well, well. Look who we've got here?" said a woman's voice, a perfect mix of surprised and playfully amused. When both of them looked towards the source of that voice, they saw Burnin walking straight towards them, a big smirk on her lips. "Long time no see,

Dynamight. It ain't every day you grace our HQ with your glorious presence."

"You know it. I'm way too busy being the strongest to be paying visits to the elderly," Bakugou shot back instantly, a mischievous smirk also blossoming on his frowning face.

"Hah, the same little shit of always, ain't we?" snickered Burnin, her smirk only growing as she happily slapped Bakugou's back. This sort of back-and-forth bickering was the type of relationship they had, but all in good fun. Neither of them was hostile to the other; they simply maintained the same level of friendly banter both privately and professionally. "It's always great to see you when you're not blowing up with those pesky villains. Anyway, what brings you here? Are you and Shouto planning a team-up or something?"

"We're here to talk with Endeavor," explained Todoroki, resuming their walk towards the elevator that would bring them to the floor where the boss's office was located. "I'm done with the stuff I had to do outside, and I'm also ready to report back to work. Is he still in his office?"

"Yup, still dealing with a crap ton of paperwork," confirmed Burnin, pressing the elevator's button herself since she was the closest one to it. Once the metal doors slid open and the two young men boarded the elevator, she jokingly gave them a haphazard salute. "Good luck with that~ He's still sulking at the fact you had to disappear for a couple of hours in the afternoon without first running it through him."

"Okay," said Todoroki while inwardly tiredly sighing at that last comment. He thought that finishing most of his work scheduled for today during the morning would make his temporary absence in the afternoon not seem like a big deal for Enji. But it seemed Todoroki had thought wrong…

Due to the massive height and size of the skyscraper, it took Todoroki and Bakugou a good handful of minutes to arrive at Endeavor's office. They had also passed by several people on their way there, from pro heroes of other agencies to staff members working on the logistics side of the business. The short interactions that occurred with a good portion of those encounters made them even slower to get to their target location.

"Endeavor, I'm coming in," announced Todoroki as he knocked on the large, bulky wooden door. He didn't wait for a proper response or acknowledgement; he still opened the door and walked into the office, Bakugou standing right next to him with the ease and relaxation of someone window-shopping at the mall.

"So you're finally back," drily said Enji, momentarily lifting his gaze from the document he was currently going through. However, when he saw that his son had arrived with company in tow, Enji was forced to do a double-take. "What is he doing here? Shouldn't he also be outside working rather than slacking who knows where?"

"...hello to you too…" grumbled Bakugou under his breath, loud enough to only be audible to Todoroki. Someone sure seemed to be in a bad mood right now. Pity they would have to make it even worse in a matter of seconds.

"We need to talk," simply announced Todoroki, making sure the door was closed before moving to Enji's desk and taking a seat on one of the chairs placed in front of it. He waited for Bakugou to also take a seat before he grabbed his wallet and started removing a folded sheet of paper from inside it. "It's about my arranged marriage."

"Oh…?" Hearing that, Enji's gaze suspiciously tightened even further. He placed the document he had been reading for the past few minutes on the desk and turned all of his attention to his son. "What about it? Have you selected one of the young ladies in the pocket folder I gave you yesterday? That was fast."

“No, I’m here to formally decline any arranged marriage offers from here on out,” declared Todoroki right away, no hesitation or dread showing on his calm but unwavering tone. He then proceeded to place the copy of their marriage certificate right on top of Enji’s documents. “I’m already married. I can’t accept any of the bride candidates you’ve selected.”

“.....E-Excuse me?” Enji blurted out after a long, silent pause, his voice cracking a little bit once he finally managed to produce any sounds with his quivering vocal cords. Since he didn’t receive any clarification from his son aside from a resolute, expressionless stare, Enji scrambled to grab the paper he had been offered. The moment Enji saw what that form was and the names and signatures in it, his eyes nearly popped out of their sockets. “WHAT!?”

“As you can see, we’ve gotten officially married today,” explained Todoroki, enunciating each word as peacefully as a priest holding mass. In comparison, Enji seemed to be nearing a flabbergasted heart attack, his big, bulky hand trembling all over the place as his eyes darted back and forth to read the entire document. “Our family register should be updated in a couple of days, but the deed is done and already fully processed by the courthouse. It would be impossible for me to marry any of the women you’ve picked for me, so I’d appreciate it if you could get in contact with them and tell them there will be no arranged marriage after all.”

“W-Wha- Why- How…!?” stammered Enji, too shocked to formulate a complete sentence. By the time he reached the end of the marriage certificate and saw his son’s signature right there, clear as day, he was ready to explode. He sort of did so literally, as a couple of flames burst from his face and shoulders and trembled against the air, as if they too were quaking under their creator’s rage. “What is the meaning of this!? What exactly have you done!? Is this your next attempt at rebelling against me!?”

“Not really, I simply got married to the person I’ve been dating for the

past three years," said Todoroki with a small shrug. In actuality, he had indeed gotten married to Bakugou as a rebellion against their family traditions, but he obviously could not reveal half of their plan to one of their 'enemies', now could he?

"Dating…!? For three years!?" yelped Endeavor, turning his flabbergasted turquoise eyes back and forth between his son and the young man leisurely sitting next to him. He had absolutely no idea what was happening or what Todoroki was talking about. "How come I, no, *no one* has ever heard anything about this!? Do you think I'm dumb enough to fall for such a simple trick!? This is obviously a doctored marriage certificate! There is no way you two are dating, let alone married to one another!"

"We did get married. Like I said, our family register will be updated in a couple of business days, so you can check it out yourself if you doubt that copy," sighed Todoroki, suppressing the urge to roll his eyes at his father's hissy fit. "Also, there are people who do know about us dating. You can ask Midoriya or any of our former classmates. They will all say the same thing and confirm our relationship."

"N-No, there's no way this is…" muttered Enji, the trembling grip of both his real hand and the robotic one replacing his lost limb already starting to crease the copy of the marriage certificate. Out of the blue, he redirected his sight and his anger to one specific entity inside his office. "WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO MY SON!?"

"What do you mean, what have I done!?" Bakugou hissed back, finally joining in the ongoing argument. Despite the perpetual frown present on his face, he forced himself to appear extremely shocked at that accusation, which wasn't actually that far off from the truth. He pointed with his index finger at Todoroki while also leaning his upper body closer to Enji's desk. "He was the one who came to me, and he was the one who proposed, again, TO ME! If you want to throw blame around, make sure it hits him, not me!"

“See!? There’s no way you two are actually dating! He just threw you under the bus without thinking twice!” roared Enji, sending one more fiery glare at Bakugou before he switched back to his son. “If you two were truly in a romantic relationship, he would never sacrifice you just so he wouldn’t get yelled at! He’d take some responsibility and apologise!”

“He’s telling the truth, though,” deadpanned Todoroki, still relatively at ease despite having his father fuming mad right in front of them. He was indeed the one who approached Bakugou and then proposed they have a ‘marriage of convenience’ in order to accomplish their goals. In other words, it could be said that Todoroki was the one who first ‘confessed’ his ‘love’ for Bakugou and, later on, the one who ‘asked for his hand in marriage’. Todoroki had to yet again hail praises at the ease with which Bakugou twisted words and events around at his own convenience. *If he weren’t so famous as a pro hero already, he’d be a really good infiltration agent among the villain crowd.*

“Grrr… In that case, when did you start dating!?” barked Enji, still not willing to throw in the towel and admit that his youngest son had gotten married behind his back to the man he had also been dating behind his back.

“April 10th, right after we graduated from UA,” Todoroki replied instantly, giving the impression that he had memorised that specific date since it was so meaningful for his relationship with Bakugou - which, at the moment, was also very much the truth. When he saw Enji getting ready to bark the next interrogation question, he took the initiative and stole his thunder. “We’ve been meeting every now and then for a meal out and talking on the phone on the days we can’t meet in person. Most of our dates happen when Bakugou invites me to go hiking or mountain climbing with him, just the two of us. Aside from that, we meet and spend time together in our apartments whenever our schedules match. That’s how we’ve been able to keep our relationship mostly a secret from the mass media, and why Bakugou has been keeping his private life well separate from work all of these years. Do you have any more questions, or can we go back to work already?”

“Ngh… The way you are springing this up on me now, rather than when we were discussing your arranged marriage during lunch yesterday, is far too convenient and suspicious…” grumbled Endeavor, slapping the copy of the marriage certificate on his desk. “Yeah, my gut feeling is telling me something weird is going on here… I mean, you guys don’t even call each other by your first names, and you’re telling me you’ve been dating for three years and are now married? Yeah, no way! I call BS! I’m not falling for a trick so simple-minded that even a kindergartener could see through it!”

Ugh, at this rate, we’re gonna be here the rest of the day and still come out as the losing side, all due to Endeavor’s sheer stubbornness…, groaned Bakugou in the back of his mind. When he sneaked a glance at his smartphone to check the time, he felt like outwardly groaning a second time. He was a busy man, and he wasn’t supposed to be absent from his post the entire afternoon, even if Best Jeanist and a few sidekicks were currently covering for him. *We need to end this ASAP before I lose my patience, before this moron says something on impulse that implodes our plans, or before Endeavor gets too pissed off to hold a proper conversation…*

But what else, other than continuing to debate with Enji in an attempt to convince him they were truly dating, could he even do? The family register wasn’t updated yet, so there was no way to instantly prove that the copy of the marriage certificate they had brought with them was the real deal. Contacting the courthouse was also not an option, even if they used the personal contact that Todoroki had taken advantage of to book a last-minute appointment in the family court department. Seeing as their marriage was the only concrete proof they had at their disposal at the moment, if Enji refused to believe the evidence they brought him was real, then there was little they could do. They had their hands completely tied at the moment - something that irked and annoyed an already extremely impatient Bakugou to no end.

Argh, shit! This is why it’s always better when I’m the mastermind behind any plans, schemes and ploys! If I want a job well done, I have to be the

one doing it!, inwardly screeched Bakugou, finally hitting the limit of his thinning patience. Desperate times called for desperate measures, and since words weren't getting through Enji's thick skull, maybe actions would do a better job at convincing him otherwise. *I hate the fact I've been cornered to this point but fuck. This. SHIT!!!*

After nearly grinding his teeth into dust, Bakugou lightened all the tension on his jaw at the same time he lunged his hand towards Todoroki. Before his 'spouse' had had any time to say anything, he grabbed the front of his t-shirt and gave it a yank strong enough to force Todoroki's upper body to lurch in his direction. Now that he was at just the right distance, Bakugou used his free hand to secure Todoroki's head in place by cupping his face and then did the unthinkable.

Yes, Bakugou kissed Todoroki. In the mouth. He might or might not have even used a bit of tongue for maximum efficacy.

Meanwhile, Bakugou made sure to use the hand cupping Todoroki's face to strongly pinch his earlobe in a very obvious sign of 'play along for the time being, and we'll be out of here in a matter of seconds'. Despite the clear message, though, no one aside from Bakugou actually managed to decipher it.

Todoroki might have played along flawlessly, creating a kiss scene worthy of an Oscar award, but that was only because he was far too dumbfounded to have any reaction, leaving the entire ordeal in Bakugou's hands… and mouth.

After what seemed like an eternity to nearly everyone concerned, both actors and audience alike, Bakugou finally pulled away, his rosy lips glossy from the remnants of the kiss.

"Happy now, or do you need to watch even more happening? 'Cuz my

balls are big enough to full-on make out right in front of my father-in-law," declared Bakugou, a knowing smirk on his lips as he lightly wiped them with the back of his hand. "I'm saying no to anything more than first base, though. Neither of us is into that sort of voyeuristic crap, doubly so when *family* is involved."

"....."

Much like his son, Enji was completely petrified behind his desk, his mouth hanging wide open from shock, even after the kiss had ended. The only thing that gave away that he was still alive was the steady movement coming from his expanding and retracting ribcage. Apart from that, Enji was as good as a living statue.

"Yeah, sounds like we're done here," Bakugou remarked after obtaining silence as his answer. He got up from his seat and gave a quick tap to Todoroki's shoulder to urge him to do the same. Bakugou started walking towards the office door, with Todoroki following him just a few steps behind, but he stopped halfway there. "Oh, right. We'll be moving in together in a couple of days. He's gonna need some days off from work for that and for the press conference we're hosting to disclose our relationship and marriage to the public. You'd better start adjusting everyone's work shifts to account for his absence, like, today. I'd say… yeah, a full week is more than enough for us to get all of that stuff sorted out and enjoy our honeymoon period to its fullest. That's all. See you around, father-in-law, hehehe."

The awkward silence followed them all the way to the corridor, all the more so with no one else around that area aside from the two of them. That made the return trip to the elevator a whole lot faster, even if the slightly tense mood made it feel otherwise.

"Um…" Once they reached the elevators, Todoroki took the initiative to press the call button, which, in turn, made it easier for him to finally say something. "About what-"

“An important portion of our ‘mission’ has been accomplished, so just forget about it,” sighed Bakugou while rolling his eyes around, interrupting Todoroki in the process. He knew what he was about to say, so there was no use listening to it. The moment the elevator’s door slid open, Bakugou promptly got inside and turned around to face Todoroki. He pressed the button that would take him back to the ground floor without breaking eye contact. “If forgetting is impossible for your slow, dense brain, either think of it as one heck of a once-in-a-lifetime benefit or as a bad experience akin to being bitten by a dog. Now let me go back to my god damned job, for fuck’s sake!”

“Oh.” That little gasp was the only thing Todoroki managed to say before the elevator door started closing and Bakugou vanished from his sight. He wasn’t entirely sure what he was supposed to do now, so he just stood there, right in front of the elevator, absentmindedly staring at his own distorted reflection. “...A bad experience akin to a dog bite…”

Such words weren’t the first, the last or the in-between descriptors that Todoroki would have ever used to recount this incident he had just shared with Bakugou. He couldn’t even categorise it as something bad altogether. Then, did that mean that kissing Bakugou was the former, a once-in-a-lifetime benefit?

As Todoroki began walking to the changing room to switch back to his hero costume, he caught himself thinking that putting a quantitative limitation on it from the get-go was quite unfortunate.

Abdicating such a clever method to prove their relationship when facing doubtful bystanders this early in their ‘mission’ seemed like a total waste, in his honest opinion…

Chapter 8

Ugh, this damn unofficial mission is getting me more tired than a full week of work…, groaned Bakugou on the back of his mind, having finally made it back to Genius Office, the hero agency he was currently stationed at.

To say he was itching to go back outside and go hunt down some evildoers in the name of releasing some stress would be an understatement. His cranky mood was most likely showing on his face, even with him still wearing his 'disguise clothing', hence why no sidekick or staff member was approaching him despite definitely needing him for something after his way-too-lengthy absence.

He had long outgrown the rank of 'sidekick working for Best Jeanist' and gained his current status of 'pro hero jumping around from hero agency to hero agency depending on who needed him the most', but perhaps out of habit or maybe even complacency, Bakugou was still a big supportive pillar in the hero agency where he started his career. As for where that complacency came from… well, it was a two-way street. Depending on someone stronger and extremely competent made everything much easier and smoother for everyone, whether there was an emergency or not. And, of course, having a place to fall back on once this or that big mission was successfully completed was the sort of safety line that brought about stability, both professionally and privately.

"With how late it already is, I'll get a couple of hours out in the field, but I can kiss goodbye to doing some investigation on those lunatics…" sighed Bakugou as he waited for the elevator to get to the ground floor. Even if his meeting with Endeavor didn't end up taking as long as it would have had he not taken the reins of the conversation, it was still an unplanned detour that destabilised the schedule he had crafted for the rest of his day. "Tsk, trying to do some overtime to compensate for the lost hours would mean having to listen to that jeans-obsessed freak narrate the new hero labour laws on scheduling and work hour limits all over again… A sermon is the last thing I need right now, thank you very much…"

Thinking about said laws indirectly reminded Bakugou that yet another thing he needed to do was update his personal info in all official documents and databases. It was one more annoyance he had to deal with, despite having such a busy schedule already. It wasn't something hard to do, but it was definitely time-consuming, not to mention monotonous and aggravating.

"Ugh, might as well get a portion of it already rolling so I can use the inertia as motivation to get it done asap before I rage-quit the whole thing…" grumbled Bakugou under his breath as he walked inside the elevator after letting a couple of people unboard it. Rather than pressing the button to the floor where the changing room was located, he instead went directly to the top floor, where Best Jeanist's office was.

Genius Office was located in a building far simpler and less showy compared to Endeavor's Hero Agency, but that didn't mean the time it took for Bakugou to get to his target location was any less. If anything, he was stopped for much longer whenever he crossed paths with sidekicks he was very well acquainted with due to their lengthy service under Best Jeanist's wing or staff members scrambling around like headless chickens because the people who they needed to report to were currently out patrolling or on a mission outside the agency's 'territory'. Even though he was used to it by now, these interactions still mystified Bakugou a little bit.

Overall, he wasn't all that well-liked by the general population, most likely because of his aggressive personality, habit of cussing even while out in public, and inability to take part in any sort of people-pleasing promotional activities that fostered the type of cult of personality that most pro heroes aimed for. He simply wasn't a good fit for the 'always smiling, life of the party' perception that the majority of people had for how heroes should be. However, he was extremely popular with fellow pro heroes, sidekicks and those who had support roles within the hero trade. Some even said that Bakugou - or better yet, Dynamight - was the heroic epitome that all heroes should learn to run under, from his well-rounded repertoire of attacks

and strategies to his managerial skills. And, of course, he was also eerily popular with villains and the underworld, but that was a conversation for another time…

Bakugou couldn't exactly complain about any of that, as it was a direct result of the kind of society they lived in after the big war, but he still had some gripes about it. Not that he would ever say so out loud or share his thoughts with other people. He knew very well what would come out of such a conversation, and he couldn't stand the thought of it alone.

"Hey, Best Jeanist. I'm back already," announced Bakugou, not even bothering to knock before opening the door to the boss's office. Since he knew the inside of that office so well, it didn't take him more than a second to spot an inconsistency in there. "'The heck are you doing here? Isn't today your day off?"

"K-Kacchan!" gasped Midoriya, a happy smile promptly appearing on his face when he turned around and saw his childhood friend stomping inside. He gestured towards the handful of documents in one of his hands. "I remembered I still had these with me and since I had the time, I decided to pass by and give them back to Best Jeanist."

"They've been returned, now go home, you shitty workaholic," nearly hissed Bakugou as he yanked the documents out of Midoriya's grasp.

"You have no right to call anyone a workaholic," sighed Best Jeanist, slowly shaking his head in disapproval at what he just witnessed. "You didn't even take half a day off on the day you were booked to get married."

"If I had been given a better timeline, you can bet I would have!" Bakugou retorted instantly, glaring at Best Jeanist as he slammed the paperwork on the desk. "My patience is hanging by a measly, feeble

thread so don't test me, Shitty Nerd!"

"Why are you suddenly turning this on me!?" yelped Midoriya, raising both hands up in the air as a display of his innocence on this matter. Rather than give him a proper reply, Bakugou simply scoffed a 'hmph' and turned his head in the opposite direction. After a couple of seconds, Midoriya slowly lowered his arms, carefully discerning if even such a simple movement would set him off once again or not. "Err… I take it that your courthouse wedding with Todoroki-kun went according to plan…?"

"Nothing that involves that guy goes according to plan…" begrudgingly grumbled Bakugou, his frowning features darkening even further. He pulled his hand away from the desk and crossed his arms over his chest, one of his fingers impatiently tapping against his muscled upper arm. "His idea of a rushed marriage is messed up. Someone really should send him to the hospital to check if his brain is still intact or if he dropped half of it somewhere out there."

"Yes, it's certainly weird that he picked you for such a mission, but well, Shouto has always been an unusual rendition of denim, so to speak. I can't say I'm overly surprised he came up with something that most people would have never thought of," concurred Best Jeanist, elbows leaning on the desk as he entwined his fingers in front of his face. "So long as both of you manage to complete your goals with it, I can't complain much, though. It's not like I can dictate what you can do outside of your working hours, only advise you to not go ballistic against that villain group that 'adores' you so much. If you aren't careful, your moves against them might be branded as an act of vigilantism, even with your hero license. Keep that in mind, Bakugou."

"Yeah, yeah, I know the law and how to circumvent it to my benefit, thanks for the warning," sighed Bakugou with a showy, exasperated roll of his eyes.

“T-That’s not as reassuring to hear as you think it is, Kacchan…” hesitantly pointed out Midoriya, inwardly cringing at the frightening words that had so easily slipped out of his childhood friend’s mouth. Good thing it was just the three of them inside the office at the moment…

“Anyway, since I’m stationed here for now, I need you to update my paperwork and hero license,” said Bakugou, pretending not to have heard that little, needless comment from Midoriya. “It’s faster to do it through you than go all the way to the Hero Public Safety Commission myself.”

“Why? Marital status doesn’t affect anything about your employment,” asked Best Jeanist, an eyebrow slightly arched behind his meticulously combed blond bangs.

“.....Different last name……” grumbled Bakugou, his face so scrunched up with a frown that he looked as if he had just been forced to swallow a particularly bitter pill.

“.....”

The entire room fell into a deep, tense silence. Best Jeanist didn’t display much of a reaction aside from staring completely flabbergasted at Bakugou, but Midoriya was incapable of remaining as calm. As the weight and actual meaning of those words sank in, his face became more and more terrified, to the point his open mouth and wide eyes combo resembled that of a famous screaming painting.

“Y-Y-You changed…” stammered Midoriya, far too scared to finish that sentence. No wonder Bakugou was in such a bad mood… He doubted his childhood friend was super attached to his family name. He wasn’t even all that protective of his first name, which made it possible for someone like Midoriya to continue addressing him by

such a childish nickname even as adults. If anything, ‘Bakugou Katsuki’ was simply the name he had been carrying his whole life. However, given the current circumstances, Bakugou must not be all that happy to have to make so many concessions and changes to his life, all because he was being harassed by a cult-like group of villains.

“Hmm… It’s going to be quite complicated to have three different Todorokis working as pro heroes simultaneously,” pointed out Best Jeanist, already focused on the logistics side of that matter.

“Ya think!?” barked back Bakugou, so peeved by that simple comment that he kicked the desk’s leg just like a little kid throwing a tantrum. “Just get a move on with it, will ya!?”

After that last hiss, Bakugou angrily turned around and started stomping towards the door. Midoriya and Best Jeanist simply exchanged a knowing glance with one another, both thinking they should weather the storm in silence in hopes it would make it end sooner. But just as they were about to breathe out a sigh of relief, Bakugou suddenly halted halfway through the door.

“Why are you still standing there, Izuku!? I told you to go home already!” snarled Bakugou, glancing over his shoulder at Midoriya with his furious crimson eyes. It was physically impossible for him to leave the room just like that without throwing one last shot at his childhood friend, so he did so before slamming the door shut behind himself.

“W-We might have some rough weeks ahead of us, haha…” Midoriya awkwardly laughed after the next few seconds of peaceful silence proved that Bakugou had left for good.

“I’m sure he will calm down once this initial period stops playing with his always fraying patience,” pointed out Best Jeanist with a small

shrug. “Give him a couple of days, and he will redirect all of his pent-up frustration into the creation of an elaborate web of silky fine strategies that will land the remaining members of the villain group in prison. At least, that’s what I want to believe…”

“Ahaha… Unpredictability often goes hand-in-hand with Kacchan’s plans, so it might all work out in the end, I guess…” added Midoriya, his tense smiling face a mask to hide how nervous he actually felt about that whole side mission. He had felt like that since the previous night, when Todoroki told him about it, but he was choosing to be supportive of his friends’ decision rather than try to reason with the unreasonable. “My only concern is… Well…”

“How long will they be able to keep it going, and if they’ll get all things done before then?” said Best Jeanist, easily reading what was currently going through Midoriya’s mind - mostly because he was thinking about the exact same thing. He paused to consider everything for a couple of seconds and then lowered his crossed hands to the desk. “Both Bakugou and Shouto have a strong sense of duty and are extremely stubborn. They might actually be able to stay married and live together for far longer than we think possible. After all, they do get along reasonably well and work together even better.”

“Hmm… I guess that’s true…” Midoriya also gave it a good thought, his head slightly tilted to the left and arms crossed over his chest. “They can be a dream team if they put their mind to it. It’s just that since they are both under so much stress because of their individual problems, they might end up arguing more than usual. I wouldn’t put it past Kacchan to kick Todoroki-kun out of their new home because he rubbed him the wrong way with an innocent comment or for messing up with some house chore. That used to happen again and again while we were living in the dorm, minus the kicking out…”

“Being put in the doghouse is simply part of the ‘being married experience’,” chuckled Best Jeanist, smoothing out his bangs with his hand. “It’s nothing that Shouto won’t be able to deal with, I’m sure. You don’t have to worry about them so much, Deku. They’ll be just fine. Probably…”

“Haa… Looking out for the two of them from a distance might be the only thing we can do for now, I guess…” sighed Midoriya, still far from being set free from his worries. Despite his decades-long self-training in data analysis, Midoriya couldn't predict the outcome of such an unusual mission. Had it just been a battle against a villain, it would be one thing. But their ‘enemies’ were Todoroki’s father and their family traditions, and a group of unhinged cult members that viewed Bakugou as their evil god. The sheer number of variables in that alone was certainly a disaster in the making.

However, no matter how worried Midoriya might be, he was fully aware it wasn’t up to him to interfere with their decisions. If this had been an official mission, he could have provided them with proper back-up, seeing as he was also a pro hero. But this was something Bakugou and Todoroki were doing by their own initiative, mostly while outside of their working hours. They were also free to get married and move in together for whatever reasons they might have. And last but not least, Bakugou would get royally pissed off at him if he tried to butt in on his private life.

I can already consider myself lucky that they decided to tell me and the rest of our former classmates the truth. If I get too involved in it without his permission, I’m pretty sure Kacchan will axe me from the information train… All in all, deep inside, Midoriya knew that he truly could only support them from a distance, at least until the unofficial mission turned into an official one.

He was worried about them, but they were all adults with their own lives. Besides, all of them had done plenty of growing up these past few years. The disaster that Midoriya envisioned when he thought about Bakugou being married to Todoroki out of convenience might not be as bad with this present older version of themselves…

Nope, I can’t…! As things stand, I can’t help but think this is going to end up going really, really badly! Ahhhh, if only Todoroki-kun hadn’t been so dead set on marrying Kacchan in record time, I might have been able to

talk him out of this and helped him pick someone more suitable to marry temporarily, while also convincing Kacchan to create a formal request for an investigation on the villain group targeting him to the HPS Commission. But they just had to go and get married 24 hours after making that mutual help deal! I know Todoroki-kun can be a bit dense and unaware when it comes to societal norms and relationships, but this is far too extreme of an overreaction to Endeavor's unreasonable family traditions! Not to mention, I still can't believe Kacchan was willing to consider such a plan, let alone actually follow through with it! Is it a Quirk? Were they affected by some sort of Quirk while Kacchan was arresting that member of the villain group? Ahhh, this is all so insane, I'm also about to go crazy!

"...ku. Deku!"

"Y-Yes!?" yelped Midoriya, his body flinching from head to toe and straightening upon hearing his hero name being repeatedly called while he was deep in his mumbling trance.

"If you're worried about them to the point you think you might start losing sleep over it, just go talk with them," suggested Best Jeanist, leisurely getting up from his desk so he could give a couple of comforting pats to the youngster's shoulder. "Sometimes, to enjoy a good pair of jeans, you need to break into the denim by wearing it at uncomfortable times. The same goes for people and relationships. I would never tell you to go interrogate Bakugou, as that would be akin to a death sentence for you, but you're close friends with Shouto. Go bother him with questions until your worries vanish."

"Y-Yeah… Yeah, you're right," said Midoriya, first while meekly nodding, but soon his confidence ballooned into a resolute confirmation. He happily grinned at Best Jeanist and began excusing himself, as he had definitely overstayed his drop-off visit by a long shot already. "Thank you very much, Best Jeanist. Good luck with the rest of your shift!"

"Ah, to be young again…" chuckled Best Jeanist as he watched

Midoriya leave his office with his batteries all recharged. Hopefully, his little piece of advice would help Midoriya not be such a worrywart while also keeping him from accidentally detonating the powder keg known as Dynamight for the millionth time. For all his weird peculiarities, Todoroki was also a very good friend, and as such, he would surely do a good job helping Midoriya accept and overcome this awkwardness he felt over his childhood friend's sudden marriage with such an unexpected partner, even if said marriage was just a temporary, business-like exchange.

Best Jeanist was quite pleased with himself and the wonderful growth of the next generation of heroes when he came to a halt mid-sitting back down. A new realisation had just popped up in his mind, and he was at a loss about what to do about it now.

"Ah… I should have also told Deku to be careful about the type of questions he asks Shouto. He and Bakugou have such great potential when it comes to team-ups and partnerships. It would be beyond tragic if Deku accidentally made things awkward between them because of this mission…"

Chapter 9

Even as Todoroki stepped inside his apartment, fresh out of his shift, he was still busy with swirling thoughts as he mulled over a certain dilemma. Or better yet, he had two big dilemmas on his hands, but only one of them was currently keeping his brain very well entertained.

The dilemma was quite simple, maybe even stupidly so, but that didn't matter to Todoroki. As far as he was concerned, this was a very serious matter that he needed to find an answer to as soon as possible.

So I say, but I've been thinking about it since we both went our separate ways, and I still have no idea where it is that Bakugou might live… Todoroki sighed in the back of his mind, making a beeline for his kitchen to warm up the food his sister had given him. Yes, Bakugou's current address was the big dilemma that he was stuck processing. Go figure. *I missed my chance to check it myself through the proof of address that he brought to the courthouse. And since we're about to move in together, we used our respective hero agencies' addresses as the location they can send any letters or documents to, so there's no use in checking the copy I showed to my father either…*

Before their meeting with Enji, while they were planning their 'relationship background', Bakugou had mentioned that he knew where Todoroki lived, and that Todoroki, too, would be able to figure it out if he thought about it.

Well, that turned out to be a complete lie.

He found absolutely no clues about it in any text message he exchanged with Bakugou or their former classmates. He didn't remember ever talking about Bakugou's apartment or listening to any conversation that had brought up that kind of topic. He wasn't even

sure if Bakugou had ever invited anyone over, be they friends or coworkers.

Todoroki could think of a handful of ways he could find Bakugou's address, like asking Mitsuki about it via texting or interrogating a certain someone with an innocent bad habit of stalking his childhood friend, but he felt that such strategies would be a total breach of privacy. Not to mention, if Bakugou ever found out he did such a thing behind his back, getting locked out of their new home would be the smallest of his problems.

So here he was, scavenging through his memories to find any clues that might narrow down the list of potential neighbourhoods where Bakugou might live. So far, nothing had come to mind.

“At this point, I should just give up and ask him directly…” Todoroki mumbled under his breath as he carried his dinner to the dining table. After setting the table and taking a seat there, he grabbed his smartphone from his pocket and placed it on the dining table too. Todoroki had made up his mind to either text or call Bakugou once he was done with his dinner.

To distract himself from that big mystery, he decided to turn on the TV and check the news. He was quite relieved that no big scandals were being announced that night. It meant that no one had caught them in the courthouse earlier that afternoon and that no one had accidentally leaked any information to social media or any such public place.

They hadn’t discussed yet how they should go about announcing their marriage to the world, but Todoroki was sure that Bakugou would be able to come up with a great plan to milk the entire situation for all its worth. They needed to make sure they were the talk of the town via the press conference they’d be hosting, but they also had to turn it into a wholesome, convincing act that made them look like your regular newlywed couple. Bakugou wanted to make himself appear to

be a normal person who just so happened to be a genius and the strongest pro hero in Japan, rather than a god-like entity that had to be worshipped. A cute, lovey-dovey press conference would certainly ruin the perception that the group of villains harassing him had of Dynamight, maybe even make them give up on him altogether.

…No, I doubt it will be that easy…, sighed Todoroki to his own buttons, his heterochromatic eyes focused on the news segment covering the investigation being made about the bank robbery Bakugou had helped deal with the previous week. As far as the public was aware, all that was being done about it was routine searches and interrogations of both perpetrators and victims/witnesses. But those in the law enforcement and the pro hero fields knew better than that. *I doubt announcing our fake relationship and marriage will have much of an impact on the villain group. I've only seen one of their members, but if that's how they all act, then their convictions and beliefs are far stronger than whatever message we might publicly put out there during the press conference. They might even become more desperate and aggressive, thinking that I'm stealing Bakugou from them and corrupting the god of murder and death they worship.*

If that ended up being the case, then it was a good thing that Todoroki was also a pro hero. He could easily deal with angry, jealous cult members and arrest anyone who tried to retaliate against him or any of their friends and families. Bakugou hadn't married a defenceless nobody, but the person he shared the title of 'Top Two' with. He was helping Todoroki with his family feud and even making compromise after compromise just so he could have the marriage that officially freed him from an arranged marriage sponsored by his father. The least he could do for Bakugou was cooperate as much as possible with the takedown of the villain group.

"I'll ask him about that too after-" concluded Todoroki, quite satisfied with himself for having found a compromise that benefited his 'spouse' above all else. He would have kept riding that wave of satisfaction until the end of his dinner had his smartphone not started ringing out of the blue. The caller ID told him that Bakugou was the one contacting him. Todoroki didn't even need to think twice about answering. "Hello?"

“I’ve found the perfect spot for us to move in together,” announced Bakugou right away, forgoing all greetings and pleasantries. *“It’s an apartment smack dab between your hero agency and the ones I usually work at. It’s also super close to a train station and all that stuff. Two bedrooms, each with its own bathroom and toilet, plus an extra room that can be used for whatever we feel like. The kitchen, dining area and living room are in the same division, but it’s big enough for two grown men to do their own stuff separately without constantly bumping into one another. Also, it has one big balcony, since it’s on the top floor of the apartment complex. Last but not least, the security in the building is just perfect to keep both lunatics and paparazzi far, far away from my private life.”*

“Okay,” said Todoroki after he swallowed the food he had been eating throughout Bakugou’s lengthy sales pitch. “When can we move in? Also, what’s the rent?”

“We can move in whenever. The rent was initially 200.000 yen per month, but I managed to haggle it down to just 170.000 yen. Though we do need to also pay for the security deposit, moving in fees, and yada yada,” announced Bakugou, the tone of his voice hinting that he was quite happy with his negotiation skills.

“That’s pretty cheap for what it is,” noted Todoroki, one of his eyebrows slightly arched at hearing such a weirdly low monthly rent. A 3-bedroom apartment on the top floor of an apartment complex with pro hero-grade security, located right in the middle of a bustling city, was usually double, sometimes even triple, the cost Bakugou had just given him. “So what’s the catch?”

“Huh? There’s no catch, I’m just that good at finding good deals in the real estate market,” scoffed Bakugou, his voice dropping a couple of octaves into sulky territory.

“.....” Sometimes, complete silence said more than any words

ever could, and that was doubly so when the aforementioned silence was coming from Todoroki's disbelief, a twinge of suspicion sprinkled in.

"Ugh, you're such a pain in the ass!" groaned Bakugou out of exasperation after a couple of seconds of waiting for anything at all. He loudly sighed and then finally grumbled, *"The previous resident died in there, okay? Now no one wants to rent or buy that place, no matter how big of a steal the price might be. I couldn't care less about crap like that, so accepting such a great deal suits me just fine. I never had any issues with where I currently live, and I bet it's gonna be the same there too. But if you're stupidly superstitious or scared of ghosts or whatever, I'll look for a different apartment, I guess… Ain't no way we're getting a better deal than this one, though. Don't come crying to me if my next find has double the rent of this one!"*

"....." Well, that certainly was not the kind of catch Todoroki was expecting to hear.

He was thinking something along the lines of the location being in a sketchy area of the city or it needing some serious repairs here and there, not that the property was basically the most controversial type of akiya vacant houses. Hardly anyone in Japan wanted to live in a place where someone had passed away. That reluctance automatically made the property value of those locations drop like a rock to the bottom of the real estate market.

During the big war against the League of Villains and their associates, quite a lot of people ended up dying before they could escape to the safety of one of the shelters sprinkled all over the country. The damages incurred during the merciless battles between good and evil also destroyed a good portion of the buildings in highly populated areas. The rubble and ruins left behind were later demolished and rebuilt anew, erasing most of the buildings where human lives had sadly been lost. However, although 'haunted' locations where someone had previously died were extremely rare as of now, they could still be spotted in areas that weren't as intensely rebuilt.

"...I can't tell if picking such a place to live just to get a discount on rent is on brand with your 'great explosion murder god' persona or not…" deadpanned Todoroki once he was done processing such surprising information. Now he was even more curious about where Bakugou lived, as he had alluded to currently renting a different akiya location. "What is it like living there?"

"What kind of question is even that!? It's a freaking apartment, just like any other! Who cares if someone dropped dead in here before I took a step inside? It's not like I'm living in an active murder scene, the whole apartment was professionally cleaned way before I started looking for a place to live!" Bakugou hissed, inadvertently becoming slightly defensive after being asked such a bold question. *"The housing market has been hellish for years now! You gotta use all the deals and bargains you can find, or else your bank account is gonna get drained right before your eyes. So this is the last time I'm asking you, are you game or are you gonna make me look for a different apartment that is ridiculously expensive for the little hours we'll be spending in there per day!?"*

"No, I'm okay with that apartment," said Todoroki, trying his best not to chuckle at Bakugou's hissy fit. "If you say it's a good location for our current needs, then I'm on board with it. Even if someone died there in the past."

"Keep annoying me like that and there will be two deaths associated with that address…" warned Bakugou, his voice almost a cold growl. *"I'm gonna go call the realtor to tell him we're taking it, even if you change your mind after sleeping on it. By- "*

"Wait, don't hang up!" gasped Todoroki, his back straightening instantly when he realised Bakugou was about to end their conversation. He inwardly let out a sigh of relief as Bakugou mumbled a sulky 'What now?' soon after. "Where do you currently live?"

“Huh? What does that matter to you?” asked Bakugou, still feeling extremely salty about this conversational topic. *“We’re about to move in together, so you not knowing where I currently live won’t impact our fake marriage much, so long as you don’t babble about it to the wrong person.”*

“No, I was just… We’re both taking some time off from work, right? I was wondering if you wanted some help moving your stuff… or something…” suggested Todoroki with a certain hesitation. For some reason, he was getting weirdly self-conscious about having made this offer on impulse. He could still feel a genuine interest in the mystery address dilemma; there was no changing that. But in a matter of seconds, that curiosity shifted into something more as it dawned on him that they were on the verge of living together once again. “You had mentioned before that we should make a spectacle out of moving in together so… I figured that could be a good first place to start…?”

“Oh, right. There was that too, wasn’t it?” By the sound of his voice, it looked like Bakugou had forgotten about that portion of their previous conversation. It wasn’t all that surprising, as no concrete plans had been made about anything aside from their rushed marriage so far. However, now that Todoroki had brought such a suggestion back to the table, Bakugou was carefully thinking about how beneficial that sort of scheme would be for their ‘mission’. After a couple of minutes of this, Bakugou finally sighed and announced his verdict. *“Alright, go to your balcony for a bit.”*

“My balcony?” repeated Todoroki, feeling a bit lost about that sudden instruction. Was Bakugou about to indicate the direction of where his apartment was located or something along these lines? Despite his incomprehension, Todoroki nevertheless did as told and got up from the dining table, quickly reaching the glass door leading to the location in question. As soon as he opened the door, his face was greeted with a sticky, warm summer wind, even as the sun set far away in the distance. Thanks to his Quirk, such muggy weather didn’t bother him much, but the difference between the outside and his air-conditioned apartment was still like day and night. “Okay, I’m outside.”

“Great, look down,” tiredly sighed Bakugou, his voice sounding so very fed up but also… weirdly echo-y?

“Oh,” gasped Todoroki, his eyes opening slightly more out of surprise. At first, when we looked down, all he saw were the balconies of his downstairs neighbours and the buzzing street he had walked by so many times in the past two years. But right afterwards, an unmistakable mass of spiky blonde hair popped up into his field of view from right below, at a distance that was an exact copy of their days living in the dorm. Once again, it took a couple of seconds for Todoroki to process what he was seeing and all the implications behind it. “...We’re neighbours? How come I had no idea about it?”

“Hah, that’s what you get for being a dense idiot with zero situational awareness,” scoffed Bakugou, his voice coming from both Todoroki’s smartphone and the balcony below. *“Though well, I also made sure it stayed like that. You’ve been a great cover-up for my current address. No one would think Dynamight lives right below Shouto, hehehe. So thanks for your contribution to my peaceful private life!”*

“You’re using me to hide in plain sight?” deadpanned Todoroki, his usually expressionless face becoming even blanker as he intensely stared at the smug expression on his neighbour. Thinking more closely about it, yeah, that did indeed sound like something Class A’s resident gremlin would gleefully scheme behind everyone’s backs.

“It’s called ‘misdirection’, a funny little trick that all magicians worth their salt have mastered,” explained Bakugou, the mischievous smirk on his lips widening even further. *“Since you’re so bad at disguising yourself, you’re constantly being spotted by everyone, both journalists and paparazzi, and regular citizens. With all of that focus on you, no one would be paying all that much attention to the apartment right below yours, right? And before you start accusing me of taking a page out of Izuku’s bad vices, I moved here first, okay? I found this place and moved in pretty much right after we graduated! You renting the apartment above mine later on was just a convenient coincidence that I learned to use to my*

own benefit!"

"I see…" said Todoroki, closely listening to Bakugou's informative clarification. Unusual methods aside, it sounded like his former classmate had simply been using the cards he had been dealt in the best way he could. In other words, it was just Bakugou being Bakugou. "You could have said something, though. It's not like I'd ask you to stop whatever it is you're doing, since it hasn't bothered me at all."

"Yeah, no, thanks. I know very well what would happen if I gave my address all willy-nilly to any of you," scoffed Bakugou while rolling his eyes around. His job there was done, so he pulled himself away from the railing he had been leaning on and started walking back inside his apartment, far away from Todoroki's gaze and the intense summer temperature. *"I had to put up with living at the dorm with you guys for three years, I could use a good, lengthy break from the mess you invite everywhere you go. I called it 'peaceful private life', right? Well, let's just say it wouldn't be as peaceful if you guys kept barging in whenever you feel like it!"*

"I highly doubt anyone would be stupid enough to come visit you unannounced," deadpanned Todoroki yet again, likewise returning to the comfortably cool interior of his apartment. As he locked the balcony door behind himself, he thought a bit more about what he had just rashly claimed. "...No, actually, some of our former classmates would be stupid enough to come visit you unannounced…"

"See!? Now do me a favour and keep my address a secret from all of those pests, even if I'll only be here for a few more days," hissed Bakugou, feeling irked at just the prospect of those unannounced visits. *"Also, this might be a conversation for later, but I'm just gonna go ahead and say at least this much already! We need house rules while we're living together! And rule number one is we need two 'yes' before we invite someone over! Family is obviously an exception, but if you dare to bring any of those pests there out of the blue just because they begged you, I am gonna lock all of you outside until I'm done cooling down!"*

“That’s a bit unreasonable, but I’ll try my best to keep that in mind,” sighed Todoroki, fully aware that caving in and allowing Bakugou to have his way with the ‘house rules’ was the best way to keep their new living arrangement as drama-free as possible. However, he had to agree they needed to have a nice, lengthy conversation about the entire moving-in process and how to use their cohabitation as a way to conclude their unofficial missions. “Actually, we should-”

Todoroki was about to suggest having that conversation right now, since they were already at it, but the invitation ended up being cut short by the sound of his doorbell. Someone had rang his apartment from down below the apartment complex’s front door.

“Sorry, it seems I have a visitor,” said Todoroki, feeling surprisingly sad that he had to put a stop to their phone call. It wasn’t every day he could have such a productive conversation with Bakugou, so he was starting to really enjoy himself. This interruption was quite unfortunate, indeed…

“I also need to call the realtor and let him know we’re taking that apartment, or else someone as smart as me will snipe it from us and get that sweet deal instead,” added Bakugou, his voice trying to mask how eager he was to get said ‘sweet deal’. By the looks of it, the prospect of living in a place where someone had died truly did not faze him in the slightest. As expected of a battle-hardened warrior who went through hell and came out of it stronger than ever, Todoroki couldn’t help but think.

“I’ll talk to you later, then,” added Todoroki at last, which was only reciprocated with a small acknowledging grunt. The next thing he heard was the clicking sound of the phone call ending. After one more disappointed sigh, Todoroki left his phone at the dining table next to his now-cold dinner and leisurely walked to the entrance area.

Much like in the majority of modern apartment complexes, Todoroki's apartment came with an intercom by the front door, which he could use to unlock the main entrance of the building without needing to set foot outside. It also came with a built-in camera, so Todoroki was able to see with his own two eyes who this mystery visitor of his was ahead of time.

To his surprise, it was someone he knew just as well as he knew Bakugou.

"Midoriya…"

Chapter 10

“I’m sorry for dropping by so suddenly, without even a warning beforehand,” said Midoriya apologetically as he removed his shoes while in the entrance area of Todoroki’s apartment.

“It’s fine, don’t worry about it,” reassured Todoroki, patiently waiting for his friend to be ready to come inside before guiding him to the living room area, which was just a couple of steps away from the entrance. If there was one thing he had learned about Midoriya throughout the years, it was that he never did something without a reason. It was very unusual of him to show up at someone else’s home out of the blue, all the more so when their go-to way of communication was phone calls and text messages. As such, if Midoriya came knocking on your door, there was a very high probability that an extremely serious conversation was about to go down.

“Oh, I even interrupted you while you were eating dinner…” mumbled Midoriya, feeling even more guilty about his last-minute visit when he saw the half-eaten meal neatly spread out on the dining table.

“My food went cold a long time ago. You really have nothing to apologise for, Midoriya,” deadpanned Todoroki, fully aware that the reason why his dinner had been placed on the back burner was definitely not his friend’s fault. The true culprit was actually Bakugou’s phone call and the ensuing lengthy conversation that came from it. Todoroki could easily tell Midoriya precisely that, but, for some reason, he felt it would be for the best to keep all of that to himself. “Do you mind if I continue eating while we talk?”

“Not at all,” said Midoriya, his panicky expression softening to a smile. Todoroki asked him if he wanted to eat something too, as the good host he was, but he declined, since he had already eaten before coming by.

With that, they both sat at the dining table, with Todoroki returning to his home-cooked dinner while Midoriya occupied the opposite seat.

"So, what is it that you want to talk about?" asked Todoroki right away after he finished chewing the first bite he took. Midoriya's body flinched just a tiny bit at that direct question, which solidified that he was right on the money. "Did something happen at work, even though today was your day off?"

"No, no, everything is going just fine on that front," denied Midoriya, shaking his head so fast that his face momentarily turned into a blur. Once the head shaking ended, he nervously fidgeted around with his hands. "It's just, I was in the area so I decided to pay you a visit… or something… I do want to talk to you about something, but it doesn't have anything to do with work. Or at least it doesn't have anything to do with official work… A-Anyway! I saw Kacchan earlier today just as he returned to Best Jeanist's agency, but since he was in such a bad mood, I couldn't ask him anything… H-How did your courthouse marriage go…?"

"It was surprisingly easy and fast," shortly explained Todoroki before popping a bit more food into his mouth and slowly chewing it. "We came in with all the documents needed, so I simply had to fill in the marriage registration form with both of our personal information, and then wait for the civil worker officialising our marriage to do the rest. From what he told us, our family register should be updated in a handful of business days, but as far as the courts are concerned, Bakugou and I are now officially married."

"I-I see," acknowledged Midoriya, nervously gulping down the hard lump in his throat while he nodded along. "I bet Kacchan was sulking throughout the whole process. All the more so after losing his original family name… Um, speaking of which… Why did you decide to change his family name to yours…?"

“It’s just one more pawn to use against my father,” said Todoroki with a quick shrug. “Since he’s so obsessed with reputation and the family name, I figured he’d more easily accept our marriage if Bakugou took on ours. Besides, he’d be one more person carrying on the family legacy. Complaining to have one of the strongest pro heroes in Japan as his son-in-law would be going against everything my father believes in.”

“T-That makes sense, yes…” acknowledged Midoriya yet again. In all honesty, such a reason made *too much sense*, to the point he had to wonder if such a ‘pawn’ was truly something Todoroki had only come up with a day ago, but he decided to keep quiet about it for the time being. Then again, he needed to stop dancing around the subject and get to the point that had actually brought him there, even though knowing the truth might bring about so many chaotic changes to so many people. Midoriya took a long, deep breath, calmed down his nerves as much as possible under these circumstances, and asked, “Todoroki-kun, I don’t want you to take this the wrong way, but do you mind if I ask you something about this unofficial mission you’re doing with Kacchan…?”

“Hm? Sure.” Todoroki was a little bit confused about the sudden shift in Midoriya’s demeanour, but he nevertheless went along with it. His friend was going to be a big help as their plan moved forward, so Todoroki thought it was only fair to discuss as many details about it as possible beforehand, if only so they wouldn’t be contradicting one another once their marriage went public.

“Why Kacchan?” asked Midoriya. His voice was a bit hesitant at first, but once those two words were out of his mouth, he found it easier and easier to add more and more to that question. “I understand what it is that both of you are trying to do, but there are so many different strategies you could try first before going forward with something so drastic. I know it can be challenging to deal with Endeavor and his unreasonable demands, but it’s not like he’d force you to marry someone of his choosing. He wouldn’t even try to back you against the wall until you had no choice but to accept the arranged marriage proposal. Before jumping into a marriage of convenience with Kacchan, you could have, I don’t know, organised a family meeting

where all of you talked about your dislike of that family tradition, or hired an actress to take on the role of your girlfriend until you managed to talk Endeavor out of an arranged marriage. And the same goes for Kacchan. He should have gone to the Hero Public Safety Commission and put in a formal request for a full-fledged investigation into the villain group harassing him, rather than trying to solve that entire issue all on his own… What I'm trying to say here is that it makes no sense why you'd choose to deal with those two problems with such a crazy method rather than go through more normal and direct routes. I mean, between my suggestions and your current plan, there's hardly any difference in how probable they are of being a success, so it's not even a matter of which is better and more likely to get you the results you want…"

"Midoriya, I think you're failing to see a very important detail about this mission," sighed Todoroki as he lowered his chopsticks to his plate and left them resting there next to his half-eaten dinner. "We're not going for the drastic plan from the get-go. We're doing it because we've already exhausted all other options, one way or another. You're right when you say my father wouldn't physically force me to marry someone of his choosing. But that doesn't mean he won't keep trying until he gets what he wants. He has already failed to honour that family tradition with all of my siblings. I'm his last chance to do it. He's fully aware he has lost the control he used to have over me, and he also knows how badly he messed up when it comes to his family, but that doesn't mean he's ready to throw away what has defined him as him for nearly his entire life. He'll keep pushing us so he can regain that control back, even if unconsciously, and add more strain to our family's relationships. Things have finally gotten to a point where everyone is comfortable with their new status quo, I don't want to be the reason why all of that gets destroyed…"

"Todoroki-kun…" mumbled Midoriya, initially having had the intention of offering some comforting, reassuring words but stopping himself almost right away. There was no use in trying to convince Todoroki of the opposite when he was the main reason why his family had been able to reach their current coexistence. Had Todoroki not rebelled against his father during his first year of high school, Midoriya couldn't see how those strained family relationships and bonds could have been rearranged in such a transformative but beneficial way. If he were to begin another rebellion against his

father, his mother and siblings would also get dragged into it, and what they had built these past couple of years could very well return to the starting line irreversibly.

"While I agree with you that there are other things I could have tried before going forward with my marriage of convenience with Bakugou, no other solution could have assured that everyone involved came out of it unharmed," added Todoroki after letting out another tired sigh. "Besides, bringing a completely unrelated woman into my messy family feuds could very well end badly, both for her and for me. Bakugou is able to deal with my father without breaking a sweat, and he's also aware of everything that happened in the past, so he's one of the most compatible partners for this 'mission'. As for Bakugou's side of the deal… I can't tell you how he truly feels about it and the harassment coming from that villain group, but I think the fact he accepted this plan almost right away speaks for itself, in a way."

"True, Kacchan isn't one to accept any plan he isn't certain will succeed," chuckled Midoriya, fully in agreement with that last assessment about his childhood friend.

"I doubt Bakugou hasn't thought about going through the official channels to be able to deal with his 'followers' for good. He always goes for the best path of least resistance whenever formulating a plan, after all. So something must be stopping him from doing exactly that," pointed out Todoroki, relaxing a bit more now that the topic isn't his family. "The biggest problem I see with requesting a formal investigation through the HPS Commission is how good they are at staying hidden. Bakugou has been the only one capable of arresting some of its members, even though Best Jeanist and a few other sidekicks have been trying to help him out. In other words, they only reveal themselves when Bakugou is around or to request that Bakugou be the one to deal with them. That means that having more people involved in their investigation wouldn't be of any help. If anything, it would remove pro heroes, sidekicks and other staff members from cases where they are needed the most. To sum it up, it would be a waste of resources and personnel."

“Yes, if Kacchan is truly the only person who can directly interact with that villain group, involving more people in it would not only not help solve the case but would also negatively affect the safety of the country as a whole,” acknowledged Midoriya, nodding along with his own words. He had thought about both of his friends’ problems time and time again, but he hadn’t considered any of the points Todoroki had brought forward. “Still, arresting an entire group all on his own would be like looking for a needle in a haystack. It will take Kacchan ages to get them all, since he’s doing it mostly outside of his work hours, unless they cause an incident somewhere, like with the fake bank robbery.”

“That’s where I come in,” announced Todoroki with a resolute nod of his head. “If us going public with our marriage won’t disillude them of Bakugou’s ‘godhood’, then I’ll be aiding him in arresting them. With how deluded they are about their ‘murder god’, there’s a very high chance they won’t like me all that much. They might think I’m stealing their ‘god’ or tainting him or something along those lines. That might lead them to also come after me, making it a bit easier to capture them without involving innocent people in it.”

“Oh, you’re right. That might actually be a good method to force them to reveal themselves, even though it isn’t necessarily all that safe for you or Kacchan,” said Midoriya, falling into deep thought right afterwards. Such a plan would not only lessen the burden on Bakugou, but also reduce the number of potential future victims.

“I’m a pro hero, I’m used to dealing with villains,” deadpanned Todoroki in an attempt to minimise the danger he was actually signing himself up for.

“Then… does that mean you think you’ll be able to make it work?” asked Midoriya, returning to his meeker demeanour once he was satisfied with his internal analytical muttering. “I mean, even if it’s for the sake of a ‘mission’, you still got married to Kacchan. Plus, you’ll be living together once again. Both of your goals might take months… maybe even over a year to accomplish. Will you, you know, really be able to stay married to him for that long…?”

“.....”

At first, when this crazy plan had just popped up in his mind by sheer coincidence, Todoroki had asked himself the same question. Would he be able to stay married to Bakugou for the sake of his goal? For the most part, their marriage of convenience was comparable to a give-and-take business deal, in which both parties got something out of using one another. No special feelings were involved in it, and they would only have to keep that charade going while out in public or when in front of Endeavor. Although there wasn’t a concrete deadline for the termination of their deal, they had both mutually agreed to get a clean divorce once they had achieved both of their objectives.

Taking all of that into consideration, then yes, Todoroki was sure he’d be able to stay married to Bakugou until the very end of their deal. After all, this was just a ‘mission’, a part of his job as a pro hero. That was the answer he had found to that question.

And yet, Todoroki was now finding himself unable to give that very same answer to Midoriya.

“I don’t think I’ll have any problems being married to Bakugou, but…” Todoroki started, carefully picking his words before he spoke them. After a small pause to figure out how he should phrase it, he finally sighed and finished what he was saying. “But I do have a couple of concerns about it.”

“A couple of concerns?” repeated Midoriya, an eyebrow slightly arched at those stiff, overly formal words.

“You know, at times it’s really hard to figure out what exactly Bakugou is thinking,” admitted Todoroki, his gaze momentarily

switching to his half-eaten dinner. “Living with him will be just like when we were at the dorm, for the most part, but that doesn’t mean he’s easy to understand. Adding that to the fact that he’s extremely independent and prideful, I can’t help but wonder all the time how far I’m actually allowed to go.”

“As in…?” Midoriya asked for further clarification, as the actual meaning of Todoroki’s words was currently eluding him.

“As in, he has been very adamant about keeping our families out of our fake marriage and dealing with them separately, so long as that doesn’t affect my side of the mission,” explained Todoroki, all while he struggled to come up with the best examples to express said concern. But ultimately, he could only truly narrow it down to a single instance as the best example for that other dilemma he was currently dealing with. “But on the other hand, he kissed me as a way to prove to my father that we’re really in a ‘relationship’.”

“I see, I se- ……Wait, Kacchan did *what* !?” At first, Midoriya simply listened closely to what his friend was saying, every now and then nodding at it. But then his ears caught what was probably the craziest thing he had ever heard in his entire life, maybe even surpassing that entire unofficial mission.

“It was the best, fastest way to convince him we’ve supposedly been dating for three years now and had finally gotten married,” pointed out Todoroki in a very leisurely fashion, light shrug of his shoulders included and all. “I figured that just bringing him a copy of the marriage certificate would do, but he’s being even more stubborn and pigheaded than I thought he’d be… The conversation was going nowhere, and accusations were already being thrown around, so maybe Bakugou got annoyed at it? Anyway, it worked. The kiss shut up my father, and everything that needed to be said about us moving in together and the upcoming public announcement was said. That proved that such a trick is extremely effective in proving that we are in a romantic relationship. Bakugou said it was just a once-in-a-lifetime benefit, but I think it would be too rash of us to put such a convenient trick on the sidelines when it’s just day 1 of our married

life.”

“T-T-T-That might be the case, but… Huh? Wait, hold on,” said Midoriya, getting visibly more confused and panicked as Todoroki kept on adding to that baffling confession. “So you think that k-k-kissing Kacchan in front of other people would be a good way to prove you are dating? W-Would you even be okay with something like t-that in the first place?”

“We’re married, so I don’t see how that would be an issue,” declared Todoroki with the ease of someone announcing today’s weather report.

“Y-Yeah, but you aren’t married for real, right?” pointed out Midoriya, trying his best to reason out with his friend. However, it was quite hard to hold a proper conversation when they both held different standards and thoughts about the topic in question.

“Yeah, but the whole process and the marriage itself *are* real,” Todoroki reiterated while giving his friend yet another relaxed shrug. “The forms we filled are real, the judge who officiated our courthouse marriage was real, and the updates to our respective family registers are real. So, for all intents and purposes, we are married for real. Married couples kiss and all that, right? Then it’s fine for us to kiss too.”

“.....”

Midoriya wanted to say something back to all of that insanity, but he was having a hard time coming up with the right words. Todoroki’s logic - or lack thereof - was weirdly solid and foolproof. Yes, they had indeed gotten married in the official sense. Yes, married couples did kiss. Yes, none of that would be considered wrong, both in the legal and societal sense. However, and this was a huge however, Todoroki

was failing to take into account the fact that **he and Bakugou were not a couple** !

“Um… T-Todoroki-kun, I’m not really sure how… I’m supposed to explain this to a grown man, but… Err… Okay, first things first, why don’t you think about what you just said for just a little bit longer and try to spot how crazy you sound right now…?” hesitantly requested Midoriya, his attempt at making his friend wake up from whatever delusional fever he was currently falling victim to. Because yes, that was the only plausible explanation for whatever was going on here.

“…? I don’t think I’m saying anything that outlandish, but okay…” For as confused as he might be, Todoroki decided to humour Midoriya and reviewed everything he had just told him in the last couple of minutes. His conclusion was… “Yeah, I don’t see any problems with it.”

“O-Of course you don’t…” winced Midoriya, currently feeling like banging his entire face against the dining table. Before he resorted to a concussion to forget this conversation, however, he decided to give logic and common sense one last go. “Alright, let’s suppose you made this deal with someone else rather than with Kacchan. How would you feel about k-kissing that person as a way to convince others you two are in a relationship?”

“That would never happen,” promptly denied Todoroki, his head slightly tilted and eyebrows furrowed in a clear indication that he didn’t like such a supposition all that much. “It was me bumping into Bakugou yesterday that helped me come up with this precise plan. If Bakugou wasn’t involved in it, none of this would be happening right now, and I’d still be trying to figure out how to decline my father’s ridiculous arranged marriages.”

H-Huh…? I feel like… I just heard quite the life-changing revelation just now… , Midoriya squeaked in the back of his mind, drops of cold sweat already starting to run down his temples. “Um… Todoroki-kun,

could it be… that you, um… l-like Kacchan…?”

“Isn’t that obvious?” Todoroki asked back without a drop of hesitation, his head promptly returning to a straight position. “He’s a friend, of course I like him.”

“T-That’s not what I meant…” nearly sobbed Midoriya, assaulted by a second wave of this intense urge to blow a hole into the dining table with his head. “I mean as, you know, like like. The r-romantic type. The ‘I want to marry you’ kind of liking someone, you could say.”

“I don’t think so,” said Todoroki after considering Midoriya’s amended question. “It’s not like I’ve ever thought about wanting to marry him.”

“No, you clearly have, since you were the one who came up with that plan…” tiredly sighed Midoriya, his way to cover up the cringing scream that wanted to break free from his vocal cords. He was forced to realise all over again how hard it was to hold a conversation with someone whose baseline was radically different from his own. Midoriya wasn’t willing to give up just yet, though. If anything, he was now more determined than ever to uncover the actual truth. “Then… if Kacchan had declined your proposal, would you have tried to find someone else to have a marriage of convenience with…?”

“No, that would be way too troublesome,” denied Todoroki, this time not having to think all that much about Midoriya’s question to know his answer to it. “This arrangement works because both of us are getting something out of it and are on the same page about the entire process. It just wouldn’t be the same thing. In fact, marrying anyone but Bakugou would be the same as holding an arranged marriage of my own volition, which you already know I’m against.”

A-Again, I feel like I just heard one hell of a confession…! , yelped Midoriya in the back of his mind, his sweat already starting to wet his

clothes despite the pleasantly air-conditioned insides of Todoroki's apartment. "So, um, what you're trying to say is that it's okay for you to marry Kacchan, but anyone else would be a no from you?"

"I guess you could put it that way, yes," said Todoroki with a single nod of his head. After having answered so many questions, he was starting to wonder what exactly was this important matter that Midoriya wanted to discuss with him. Surely he hadn't gone out of his way to visit him just because he wanted to talk about their unofficial mission, right? That was the sort of thing that they could have just discussed during a phone call.

"I-I see, ahaha…" acknowledged Midoriya, a hollow, tired laugh sneaking its way out of his lips. He had to laugh, one way or another, or he'd find himself passing out from shock. There was dense, and then there was whatever it is that Todoroki Shouto was… *How exactly can someone be this blind, but also ridiculously obvious at the same time…? No wonder Kacchan was grumbling about wanting to send Todoroki-kun to the hospital so the doctors can make sure he's a-okay in the upstairs department…*

It truly was a mystery of nature, one that Midoriya had no idea how to crack at the moment. Maybe he wasn't actually meant to figure it out until the source of said mystery had some sort of breakthrough or awakening that made him realise the reason behind why he was so eager to marry Bakugou and Bakugou alone.

"I guess all I can say is good luck, Todoroki-kun…" sighed Midoriya, a rueful smile somehow climbing all the way to his face. The clueless look on his friend's face made him sigh all over again. "I wish good luck to Kacchan, too… Both of you are really going to need every little bit of it that you can get, at this rate…"

"Why does everyone keep wishing us good luck…?" mumbled Todoroki under his breath, feeling just a tiny little bit miffed at that friendly, supportive comment. It was as if several people around them

were already thinking of their plan as a failed endeavour from the get-go. “Is it really that weird that Bakugou and I are teaming up?”

“I-I wouldn’t say it's weird per se, but even you have to admit that this mission is being done under very unusual circumstances,” pointed out Midoriya, softly scratching his cheek to try to mask his embarrassment. “You and Kacchan might be able to work wonderfully well together when it comes to pro hero matters, but such private issues are… Well, I wouldn’t say not as much, but it’s not like you’re particularly close either, especially with how busy everyone has been since we graduated from UA. Plus, um… You two do bicker quite a lot when you’re together. I guess there’s this clash of personalities and you are both equally as competitive, so… Yeah, we can’t help but worry a bit, that’s all.”

“Is that really how my relationship with Bakugou looks like to others? Because that’s not the impression I have of it,” confessed Todoroki, the sulking glint on his face melting back into his usual expressionless demeanour. “Sure, we might argue a lot, but that’s mostly because Bakugou always holds me accountable for what I say and do. He doesn’t hesitate to point it out whenever I mess up, and he also won’t think twice about calling me out whenever I start slipping back into previous bad habits, which I guess causes some friction between us at times. Most importantly of all, he never once pitied me or treated me with kid gloves just because I had a rough upbringing. You guys probably don’t do it on purpose, but all of you always avoid talking about my father or my family while I’m around, unless it’s really needed. Bakugou doesn’t do that; he just gives it to me straight, whether I want to hear it or not. While I do appreciate all of your help and support so far, sometimes it gets a bit too… stuffy, I guess. I find it much easier to discuss my family matters with Bakugou because he deals with them like any other conversation or problem. Oh, I guess that’s another reason why Bakugou is the only right fit for this mission, now that I think about it…”

……You’ve already said all of this stuff and done all of these rash things in record time, and yet you’re still finding more reasons as to why Kacchan is the one… huh… Midoriya sighed inwardly, finally raising the white flag now that he heard Todoroki’s true thoughts about Bakugou and

their ‘mission’. While he still had his reservations about it, maybe it was for the best that their problems were being solved in such a weirdly roundabout fashion.

Todoroki would get an escape route out of family traditions he disagreed with without blowing up his family’s well-deserved peaceful status quo, and Bakugou would get at least one strong ally to aid him in his quest to take down the villain group that was trying to recruit him to the dark side. Unorthodox methods aside, they did seem to have a well-thought-out, solid plan. They also seemed to be taking several precautions to mitigate any future issues such a plan might cause, even if it might look like a jumbled mess to outsiders.

Continuing to press Todoroki-kun for a proper answer won’t take me anywhere as things stand right now. Maybe once he starts interacting more with Kacchan as a married couple and spending more time together with him at their new home, he’ll connect all of these extremely obvious dots and finally understand why he sees Kacchan as the only one worthy of being married to him, concluded Midoriya in the back of his mind, this time while outwardly sighing. He placed his hands down on the table, palm-side down, and got up from his seat. “Well, I won’t interrupt your dinnertime any longer.”

“Eh? Didn’t you want to discuss something important with me, Midoriya?” interjected Todoroki, his mismatched eyes opening wider just a tiny little bit.

“This was that important something,” awkwardly chucked Midoriya as he rubbed the back of his still sweaty neck. “I just wanted to confirm some things about your and Kacchan’s ‘mission’, for the sake of my own peace of mind. Well, that has been done, so it’s time I let you get your rest after working all day.”

“I had a pretty big break in the afternoon, so I’m not that tired,” deadpanned Todoroki, alluding to all the time he had spent at the courthouse with Bakugou. Midoriya simply chuckled a little bit at it.

With that exit announcement, they talked for a couple more minutes while Todoroki walked Midoriya to the front door. Midoriya used this chance to let him know that he had successfully contacted everyone on his share of the list so now the entire Class A was aware of what was going on and, likewise, Todoroki told him that they'd be sending all of them more information about their fake relationship soon so that everyone would tell the same story when asked about them. That brought Midoriya's sudden visit to an end.

"Okay then," mumbled Todoroki under his breath as he walked back to the living room area. He used the fiery half of his Quirk to lightly heat up the remainder of his dinner and quickly shoved it down the hatch. It was getting pretty late; he'd better get a move on or he'd run out of time.

Once his dinner was cleaned off the plates, Todoroki brought the used tableware to the kitchen and placed it inside the sink, all ready to be washed once he dealt with some more important tasks. On his way out of the kitchen, he grabbed both his smartphone and house keys before walking out of his apartment.

Since his new target location was so close by, Todoroki decided to forgo the elevator and headed straight to the stairs. It didn't take him even five minutes to reach a different front door, one that he was seeing for the first time, even though he had been living in that apartment complex for several years now. He calmly rang the doorbell, but then followed it with a knock on the door, to hint that the visitor was already at the front door rather than downstairs at the entrance of the building. After waiting for a little bit, the door slowly opened.

"This is exactly why I've kept my address a secret from all of you pests…" grumbled Bakugou, a pissed off frown creasing his face. "Why the hell are you knocking on my door at this god forsaken hour!?"

“I told you I’d talk to you later, right?” pointed out Todoroki, his head innocently tilted to the left as he wondered why Bakugou was beginning to kick up a fuss about something he had warned him about beforehand. “My visitor has left already, so I’m here to continue our conversati- Oh.”

It went without saying that Bakugou slammed the door shut in his face.

Chapter 11

“You have exactly 5 minutes before I take you outside of my apartment together with the trash, even if I have to drag you by the hair…” grumbled Bakugou, loudly stomping his feet on the wooden floor of his apartment as he walked to the living room. Perhaps against his better judgment, he ended up caving in and reluctantly allowed his unwanted visitor to come inside. His excuse for that was that Todoroki was too dangerous when left unsupervised, and he didn’t want to risk complicating his life any further. That’s all.

“I don’t think 5 minutes will be enough, but I’ll try my best,” deadpanned Todoroki, obediently following after Bakugou. He curiously looked around his surroundings, this being his first time in his coworker’s private residence.

“If you’re here because you changed your mind about the other apartment, you’ve come too late. I already gave the realtor our okay,” Bakugou said while dropping his body on the sofa, a tired sigh softly slipping past his pursed lips. When he looked up in Todoroki’s direction, he saw him glancing around his apartment like he was visiting some sort of attraction for the first time. “What?”

“Oh, sorry. I was just thinking that I would have never guessed that someone died in here without you telling me about it,” explained Todoroki once he noticed the moody glare Bakugou was throwing his way. Sightseeing completed, he also sat down on the sofa, a healthy amount of space between them. “Is that apartment you’ve been talking about similar to this one?”

“I keep telling you they are just normal apartments,” groaned Bakugou with an annoyed roll of his eyes. It seemed like Todoroki was completely misunderstanding what an akiya house truly was, mistaking it for something that was just a step away from a dilapidated haunted house. Yes, some of them were in pretty bad shape, especially those located in rural areas. But in a city as affluent

and populated as the one they lived and worked in, most akiya houses or apartments were put back in the real estate market in as good condition as possible to entice potential buyers or renters. Bakugou could have explained exactly that to Todoroki, but it was getting closer and closer to his usual bedtime hour. He wasn't about to waste his time on that when he could simply show it to Todoroki. He grabbed his smartphone, and after a couple of seconds of browsing through his search history, he found the listing that had led him to such a discovery. "Here."

"Oh." Todoroki accepted Bakugou's smartphone without thinking twice, his head slightly tilted as he wondered what exactly he was going to show him. He quickly concluded it was the apartment they would be renting and moving into together, based on the photos available in the listing. During their phone call conversation, Bakugou had given him a pretty good summary of the apartment, making it unnecessary for him to check the description section of the listing. All he focused on were the dozen or so photos of the interior of the apartment, each one showing a different division. A floor plan was also available with the measurements of each division and the balcony. He had been on board with them renting that place from the start, if only to make Bakugou happy and less moody, but now he was extremely pleased with his decision to leave his 'husband' in charge of their new home. "There's no way this is only worth 170.000 yen per month… They could very well ask for triple that and it would still be a steal…"

"Hah, what did I tell you?" snorted Bakugou, a victorious knowing smirk tugging at the corner of his lips. "That apartment has been up in the market for nearly 6 years now, with zero offers for either renting or buying. The company that owns the place has pretty much been lowering the price every other month since posting the listing, hoping to find someone who can overlook the fact that its previous occupant died there. The guy I talked on the phone with nearly burst into tears when I told him we'd take it."

"I can't believe such a neat, clean apartment has been available for that long without a single offer…" said Todoroki, scrolling down to the section of the listing that featured the price fluctuation of the

apartment. Just like Bakugou had pointed out, the rent price had been in a downward trend for several years now. It was beyond baffling how one single incident had doomed that high-quality apartment to being vacant for years on end. As he inwardly oohed and awed at his future residence, he suddenly remembered a certain something. “Wait, you said your current apartment is also one of these akiya houses, right? How much are you paying for rent?”

“Hehehehe. 50.000 yen per month,” proudly announced Bakugou, his smirk growing more mischievous and gleeful.

“That’s way lower than my rent…” gasped Todoroki, too scared to do the math in his head and discover how badly he was being ripped off. He still remembered how his house hunting went, so he had a clear image of what the current rent prices were around that area. 50.000 yen per month was absurdly low for their city, unless it was for a rundown room in some sort of shared house setting. The only places that came to his mind that could have such a low price tag but maintain livable conditions were college dorms and other similar discounted student accommodations. “How come I’ve never seen any listings about this type of housing?”

“Heh, are you finally starting to understand why I’ve been aiming for these ‘haunted’ spots this whole time?” giggled Bakugou, his earlier bad mood completely gone. He took his smartphone from Todoroki’s hand, locked it and slipped it back into his pocket. “Since they are so unpopular, keeping ads for them on the regular real estate websites would be a waste of money. But there’s this database run by the government that lists every single akiya location currently available in the country. That’s where I found this apartment and our new place.”

“I see,” acknowledged Todoroki with a small nod of his head. He would keep that information in the back of his mind so he could utilise it after their ‘mission’ was completed. Now that he knew of the wonders of renting these highly discounted locations, he might as well use them for his financial benefit, too.

“Is this all you wanted to talk about?” asked Bakugou, the smirk disappearing from his lips as his face returned to his default relaxed expression.

“No, I think it’s about time we go through the rest of the timeline, now that we’ve gotten married and completed step 1 of our mission,” declared Todoroki, his body straightening into a more formal sitting position. “We need to decide on a concrete date for us moving into the new apartment and make arrangements for the press conference meant to publicly announce our marriage. In my opinion, we should do the press conference first.”

“Yeah, that would be the best way to make sure those annoyances that carry cameras around will be following us every single step of the moving process,” sighed Bakugou as he propped his elbow against the sofa’s armrest and then leaned the side of his face on the palm of his hand. “For the press conference itself, we can easily use the conference room of either of our hero agencies. Actually, scratch that. We should definitely use the conference room in *your* hero agency. It would not only annoy Endeavor, but also force him to accept that our marriage is real while in front of a big crowd. Plus, it would more easily legitimise our supposed relationship in the eyes of the public. Even if we use my preference to keep my private life completely separate from my job as the reason why we kept this a secret for so long, I bet there will be plenty of people who will still doubt whether we’re really in a relationship or not.”

“I’ll get started with the preparations for the press conference then,” acknowledged Todoroki, fully in agreement with everything Bakugou had just said about his father. There were several ‘pawns’ Todoroki still hadn’t used against Endeavor, so it wasn’t as if the press conference was that important for his side of the mission. However, it would help immensely if it went according to plan. Todoroki made a mental list of everything he needed to put in motion to get the press conference rolling, from getting in contact with several news outlets to invite them there to making sure the room would be available for them to use. “What about the date?”

“The sooner we do it, the better,” remarked Bakugou with a shrug. “Some people will complain if there’s a big gap between the day we got married and the day we announced it to the world. We might as well give them as little ammunition for criticism as possible.”

“I’ll check if the conference room is available this upcoming Monday, then,” said Todoroki, also adding that to his mental list of chores. Today was Friday, so that meant they would have two days to get all the prep work done. It wouldn’t be his first time organising a press conference, as his father had made sure to teach him the entire process as one of the lessons in his quest to inherit his hero agency. However, it would be the first time in a long, long time that a press conference was going to be about his private life. The last time the Todoroki family had been the centrepiece of any public announcements was during the aftermath of Dabi - or to be more precise, his oldest brother Toya - exposing all the nasty skeletons in their family’s closet. To push such thoughts and memories aside, Todoroki sighed and returned his focus to Bakugou. “Is that okay with you? Do you think you can make it there?”

“I’m pretty good with my scheduling and punctuality, thank you very much,” scoffed Bakugou with the indignation of someone retorting ‘Who do you think you’re talking to?’ He momentarily quieted down, almost as if he was too busy pondering about something to keep the conversation going with Todoroki. Once he was done thinking… No, correction: once he was done scheming, his crimson eyes were nearly sparkling with one more of his perfect evil plans. “You know what? I think I just came up with the perfect way to end the press conference and make sure there are as few doubts about our ‘relationship’ as possible, hehehe.”

Oh no… If there was one thing that Todoroki knew about his former classmate extremely well was that Bakugou going ‘hehehe’ was never a good sign. Not because he was about to cause utter chaos - which of course he was - or that his ideas always went wrong - which they definitely never did -, but because he was unstoppable whenever it came to plotting behind everyone’s back. The only reason Todoroki would be involved in it this time rather than kept in the dark was that his cooperation was a key factor in the success of his flawless

planning.

“Remember me telling Endeavor that we would be taking a week off from work soon? Let’s make this upcoming Monday day 1 of our ‘honeymoon’,” announced Bakugou, his lips changing into a knowing smirk as he spoke. “Once we’re done saying what needs to be said about our marriage, we can just tell the reporters and journalists that we’re about to sign the paperwork for our new home. That will definitely grab the attention of those professional stalkers, which is gonna be annoying as fuck, yeah, but at least we’ll be getting all the scoops and news articles we need. It’s a pity that I’ll have to eventually reveal I’ve been living in the same apartment complex as you all along and won’t be able to rent this place a second time once our mission is over but well, that’s a sacrifice I’m willing to make if it means I get every single one of those lunatics behind bars for the rest of their miserable lives.”

“Okay, that’s not as bad as I thought it would be,” said Todoroki, unconsciously breathing out a sigh of relief. He was so used to Bakugou’s outlandish but genius schemes and ploys that he was expecting the same to apply to this press conference side mission. Fortunately, it was a far classier plan than all the crazy thoughts that had started to cross Todoroki’s mind.

“Hey, what’s that supposed to mean!?” Bakugou snapped back, his crimson eyes tightening into a glare.

“My father has already begrudgingly started to adjust everyone’s schedule to account for my week-long absence. I don’t think there will be any issues if we make this upcoming Monday the start of our vacation,” acknowledged Todoroki, completely ignoring Bakugou’s complaints and growls. “What about you? You’re currently helping out Best Jeanist’s hero agency, right?”

“I wouldn’t suggest a plan I wouldn’t be able to follow, now would I?” groaned Bakugou with yet another eyeroll. “Besides, they can survive

just fine for a week without me there holding their hands. And even if they couldn't, Best Jeanist was bitching at me for not taking a day off on my wedding day, so me thinks he needs to learn that even verbal actions have consequences."

So it's ultimately just a means for him to get some payback. Got it. By the looks of it, Bakugou's bad mood was yet to end, and all of that pent-up frustration wasn't being redirected to the usual punching bags only. Todoroki definitely needed to keep himself on his toes for the foreseeable future if he didn't want to end up on the receiving end of Bakugou's petty 'divine retribution'.

"Speaking of which, couldn't we use our current addresses as one more proof of our 'relationship'?" suggested Todoroki, his best attempt at steering the conversation back into a safer topic. "It might have been just a coincidence that we ended up being neighbours, but no one aside from our friends and family needs to know that. Once the journalists and paparazzi start asking us why this is the only building both of us visit throughout the moving process, we can just tell them we became neighbours on purpose because it made it easier for us to spend time together, even with our irregular work schedules."

"Ugh, I'm not a big fan of that one, but I guess…" grumbled Bakugou, one of his eyebrows twitching from irritation. He could already see his friends poking fun at him and creating these elaborate fantasies in their heads because of it… As he let out a half-tired, half-annoyed sigh, Bakugou grabbed his smartphone once again and opened the notes app where he had been writing down stuff related to their fake relationship. "Then Monday, we'll get the press conference done and out of our way, which will then be followed by a visit to the realtor who will become our new landlord. Signing the paperwork shouldn't take too long, but do you already have the funds available for half of the safety deposit and moving-in fees?"

"I'm way too busy with work to spend all of my salary every month," deadpanned Todoroki, choosing this explanation as his way to tell Bakugou that he was financially in the clear. "Besides, with us splitting rent, utilities and all other fees 50/50, I'll be paying less than

what I've been paying up until now."

"Well, I'll be paying more than I currently am, but at least I'll be getting a massive upgrade to my kitchen and balcony space," snorted Bakugou as he jotted down all the info related to their new apartment and how things would be split between them. "Not that money is an issue for me. Unlike you, who is perpetually stuck here because of your daddy's hero agency, I've been hopping around as needed. That plus riskier jobs come with a nice, fat paycheck every month. Heh, being the best truly is the best, isn't it?"

"It's not like I don't receive and accept requests to do more dangerous missions in other areas of the country," Todoroki replied in his own defence, slightly irked by Bakugou's sharp, pointed remarks. "We've even worked together on a couple of them, didn't we?"

"Yeah, yeah, whatever," dismissively said Bakugou with a quick shrug. "Okay, the press conference topic is dealt with, and the whole moving-in process doesn't need detailed planning. If something out of the ordinary happens, we can deal with it right there and then. Not that I'm expecting those stupid stalkers to give us too much trouble, no matter how annoying they might be. As for the other lunatics…"

"They're going to cause some trouble once they find out we got married, aren't they?" asked Todoroki, even though he already knew the answer. The short interaction between Bakugou and one member of the villain group in question that he had witnessed told him everything he needed to know about their distorted expectations and delusional inclinations.

"Probably, though I have no idea what it is they're gonna do," sighed Bakugou, his expression growing a whole lot more serious. "I think the first few days will be relatively calm on their end. But that's only because they are scheming something nasty out of sight. Once they are done with the prep work, I bet one of them will try to approach me with their usual 'sales pitch', just to test the waters. Once that fails,

they will make their actual move. Or at least that's how things went leading up to last week's fake bank robbery."

"Do you have any idea what sort of attack they will resort to next?" asked Todoroki right afterwards, he too switching back to his pro hero soberness. "Have they mentioned or alluded to anything in particular these past few days?"

"Nah, not really. The last one I interacted with was the moron you watched me arrest," denied Bakugou, his crimson eyes tightening even as he lightly shook his head. "I've noticed a bit of a pattern with these guys. They always approach me in the same order. Man, man, woman, man, man, woman, so on… The last one was a man, and the one before was also a man, so I can expect the next member that comes to talk to me to be a woman. As for larger incidents, I can't say much since the bank robbery was the only one so far. Taking all of that into consideration, their next move will be me being approached by a woman, followed by some sort of more showy incident."

"Do they just randomly approach you on the street, or do they try to mask their identity at first?" Since Todoroki was about to get involved in Bakugou's case, he wanted to get as much information on the cult members as possible. Bakugou had been their main target up until now, but that could very well change the moment they find out Todoroki is now married to him.

"It depends. Sometimes they openly ask me to join their villain group and become their official divine commander. Then at other times, they come up with some sort of excuse to lead me somewhere more private," Bakugou explained quite leisurely, even though his eyes burned with anger. "The last one walked up to me to ask me for help finding his missing wallet. I immediately knew what was going on, but I decided to go along with that dumb charade. As soon as he got me in that side street, he dropped the pretences and started going on and on about how I made the wrong decision and should join them instead of being a pro hero. As soon as he started getting too handsy, I gave him just a tiny, little point-blank explosion. Shortly after that, you showed up, and the rest is history."

“I see,” mumbled Todoroki, sinking his back into the sofa’s cushions as he steadily processed this additional information. All in all, the solo encounters seemed to be relatively easy to deal with and their danger level was also fairly low. On the other hand, incidents that involved multiple cult members were a whole lot more elaborate, dragged innocent people into it and could very well lead to injuries and maybe even casualties in the future if they weren’t stopped on time. “Do you have any idea how many members there are in that villain group?”

“Heck if I know. But I doubt it’s a very large group,” said Bakugou with a dismissive shrug of his shoulders. “They are too organised and quick at hiding for their numbers to be substantial. And since they are constantly popping up to say hello, their headquarters can’t be too far away from this city either. Then again, I’ve been staying around this area for a good while now. I have no idea if they’d follow me if I went somewhere else or even if there are other members posted in other areas of the country.”

“You or the police haven’t managed to get any information from the members you’ve arrested so far?” asked Todoroki, a bit surprised by how little Bakugou seemed to know about the group itself, even though they have been pestering him nonstop for several months now. “The bank robbers aside, I think you said you managed to find enough evidence for the arrest of seven other members, right?”

“Hah, that’s yet another annoying thing about those asswipes,” snorted Bakugou, his voice dripping with sarcasm and animosity. “Whenever the detectives try to interrogate them, they stay completely silent. The only sentence they speak out loud on repeat is, ‘We’ll only talk to our lord and saviour, Dynamight.’ Ugh, I get goosebumps just thinking about that crap… Because of that, I had to be present during several of the later interrogatories. But don’t think me being there gets them coughing up any useful information. They just go on and on and on about how I’m their ‘murder god’ and that I’m meant to lead them in their quest to world domination and blah blah blah. Whenever I directly asked them something about the group, they either gave us half answers that don’t make much sense or

claimed I already knew the answer since I've been hearing their prayers or whatever."

"What about following other members that you know about but don't have enough evidence to justify an arrest?" followed up Todoroki, exasperation bubbling up in the pits of his stomach. If just hearing about those unproductive interrogatories irritated him, then he couldn't imagine how much worse it must have been to witness them in person. This conversation was serving as a reminder as to why Bakugou had accepted his proposal almost right away - he was simply that desperate to end the nonstop harassment, after having endured several months of nearly no progress in the ongoing investigation.

"We tried that already, obviously," groaned Bakugou, both that question and his answer causing a wave of fury to ripple through his mind. "We got two different sidekicks from Best Jeanist's hero agency to follow two members on two different occasions. It led nowhere. They somehow managed to lose the sidekicks following them, both times in completely different areas of this city. We've also tried to have an agent from our side infiltrate the group, but that also failed. Our secret agent managed to meet with some of the lower, less influential members, but was vetoed out of the group before they could gather any information. I bet they must have someone in their midst with a Quirk that lets them read minds or something along those lines. Only people who truly believe I'm a god are allowed in there…"

"For such an unknown villain group, they are surprisingly good at what they do," pointed out Todoroki after heaving a tired sigh. Since this was Bakugou they were talking about, he and the detectives must have already checked the backgrounds of those members who had been arrested. They must have also searched for some sort of connection between them and Bakugou. But since Bakugou never mentioned anything about it, that portion of the investigation must have led nowhere either.

"They're good at being total pains in my ass, that's for sure," Bakugou scoffed sarcastically. He then turned his gaze towards Todoroki. "And

you're also being a total pain in my ass right now, knocking on my door at such a late hour!"

It's not that *late,* mumbled Todoroki to his own buttons, fully aware that saying that out loud would result in him getting violently kicked out of Bakugou's apartment. He was also aware, however, that Bakugou had the habit of going to bed fairly early compared to those in their age group. Todoroki didn't want to impose on him too much, all the more so when he was already in a pissy mood. It would be for the best if he wrapped up their conversation here.

Despite all of that, there was one last thing Todoroki wanted to get done today, in preparation for the challenging days they had ahead of them as a fake married couple.

"Bakugou… Before I go back to my apartment, can I try something?" requested Todoroki, turning his sitting position sideways so he could get a better view of his coworker. They were sitting next to each other on the sofa already; he didn't need to move too much to get to that perfect position he was looking for.

"Huh? What is it now?" grumbled Bakugou, feeling a bit sour that the obvious command meant to get his uninvited visitor out of his apartment had been completely ignored. Then again, this was Todoroki he was dealing with - of course his dense brain had protected him from Bakugou's passive-aggressive comments. His moody grumbling also wasn't having any effect on him. Todoroki simply continued looking in his direction with that annoying blank, serious demeanour of his. What other option but sighing did Bakugou have when faced with someone like him? "Yeah, yeah. Go ahead. Just make it quick, I wanna sleep."

"Okay," said Todoroki with a quick nod of his head. Permission granted, he straightened his back a little bit more and fully pulled it away from the sofa's cushions. Todoroki then proceeded to grab Bakugou's hand, something that got him an arched eyebrow and a

confused ‘huh?’

So far, so good. Bakugou’s hand was surprisingly warm, with a few calluses on his fingers here and there, most likely caused by the friction of his hero costume’s gloves or maybe even by the explosions themselves. Holding it didn’t cause him any consternation or other similar negative emotions. Even though he didn’t have anything backing him up on this, Todoroki concluded he’d be able to hold Bakugou’s hand for several hours in a row if the need ever arose.

This experiment confirmed that Todoroki would have no problems with doing this basic display of affection commonly used by regular married couples with Bakugou. It was now time he moved to the display of affection No. 2.

By using the hand that he was already holding, Todoroki gave a quick yank to Bakugou’s arm and pulled him closer. Once the distance between them had been reduced to less than half an inch, he let go of his hand and instead wrapped his arms around Bakugou’s torso, very carefully caging him in his embrace.

“Huh…?” gasped Bakugou yet again, steadily getting more and more confused about the meaning of all of that. Perhaps that confusion was what stopped him from gut-punching Todoroki the moment he hugged him without any warning or his permission.

Much like with the hand holding, Todoroki didn’t experience a negative response - physical or psychological - as he hugged him. All he felt was Bakugou’s warm body pressing against his, hard and muscled in some areas while also pleasantly soft and squishy in others. Thanks to being in such close proximity to him, the sweet scent coming from the nitroglycerin mixed in Bakugou’s sweat became even stronger. Todoroki couldn’t help but take a deep breath as he rested his chin on Bakugou’s shoulder, filling his lungs with as much of that wonderful fragrance as he physically could.

Yes, he could confirm that this type of display of affection would also be easy peasy for him. He could easily hug and cuddle with Bakugou whenever the opportunity presented itself, even though he wasn't entirely sure which were the right moments to do such a thing with a lover.

With display of affection No. 1 and 2 tested and approved, all Todoroki had left to do was try out the type of intimate act that had started this whole thing.

Midoriya had asked him if he was capable of kissing Bakugou just for the express purpose of proving to other people that they were a proper newlywed couple. Todoroki already knew that, yes, he had no problems with Bakugou kissing him. But what about a kiss initiated by him? Since lives could be potentially at risk here, Todoroki didn't want to find out whether he could kiss him or not when they needed it the most. Trying it out now, at a low-stakes moment, was the best time to find that out.

So that's what Todoroki did.

He lifted his chin from Bakugou's shoulder at the same time his arms slowly separated themselves from that warm, muscled but soft body. But rather than let go of him for real, Todoroki moved his hands closer to Bakugou once again and cupped both of his cheeks. From there, it was surprisingly easy to inch even closer to him and completely erase the small distance between their lips.

By the looks of it, Todoroki didn't have anything to worry about when it came to pretending to be in a romantic relationship with Bakugou. He could kiss him just fine, and this moment right here proved that.

The moment his lips touched Bakugou's, Todoroki felt his coworker's body jolt from head to toes, probably out of a mix of shock and flabbergasted surprise. Or at the very least, Todoroki figured that was what Bakugou was currently feeling, basing himself on his personal experience of having also been suddenly kissed by Bakugou.

However, leaving it as just lips bumping into lips wouldn't be enough. Such a chaste kiss hadn't been enough when they did it in front of Endeavor, and Todoroki would bet that the same would apply in similar future instances. He didn't have enough romantic experience to know the best ways to go about that all on his own, so he decided to copy what Bakugou had done earlier that afternoon.

Their lips were separated, but only for a very short second. Todoroki cupped Bakugou's face more snuggly, the tight pressure eliciting a small surprised gasp from his vocal cords. That created the right opportunity for him to deepen their kiss and slip his tongue into Bakugou's mouth.

Up until this point, Bakugou had been weirdly compliant, possibly out of immobilising confusion, but such a bold move shattered that. He grabbed Todoroki's arms with shaky hands, and his jaw tensed alongside the rest of his body, showing some clear signs of discomfort.

However, Todoroki was a man with a mission, and he had made up his mind about seeing it through to the end. Rather than ending the kiss there, he let go of Bakugou's face and allowed him to pull his arms down with those clumsy tugs. Once his arms fell on top of their laps, they pounced forward once again, this time caging Bakugou's slender waist in their embrace.

How long did Bakugou's kiss last? Todoroki had no concrete answer to that question. His perception of it told him it had gone on for a very long time. With that being the case, he also needed to make sure his kiss lasted for just as long.

When Todoroki pulled his waist closer to him, Bakugou's arms got awkwardly squished between their chests, which put a hamper on their interference for the time being. That allowed Todoroki to pour all of his attention back on the kiss itself.

Bakugou's lips - and also Torodoroki's - were now more moist due to his tongue and their combined saliva, which made it much easier to carry on the kiss uninterrupted. Todoroki now also had the leeway to notice all the little details and sensations that had been blocked by shock during his first kiss with Bakugou. The heat exuding from Bakugou's face was as warm and comforting as the heat coming from a crackling fireplace. Most of it came from his rosy cheekbones, but the most notable source was his soft lips.

Even as a teenager, Todoroki had never been all that interested in romance and relationships. His priorities had always been to become a pro hero, and perhaps due to his family background, he didn't view such a topic as something he'd ever want to include in his adult life, either. He was quite comfortable with the idea of being single for life, working as a pro hero until his retirement or until he ran out of luck and his life was claimed in battle.

Kissing Bakugou, however, was somewhat shifting those beliefs. He found himself wondering if this giddy sensation coursing through his body was what had made the majority of his classmates and other fellow students so excited about the concept of love and romantic relationships throughout their teenage years. Doing this felt quite good, he had to admit, especially when their wet tongues rubbed and entwined against one another or whenever he felt Bakugou's body trembling due to the tiniest of squeezes.

Since it felt this good to kiss him and hold him in his arms right now, Todoroki concluded that he also wouldn't have any problems with kissing Bakugou in the future as needed. He had tested and confirmed what he had already told Midoriya - yes, he would definitely be okay with being married to Bakugou, no matter how long their mission

might last. Not that he had had any doubts in the first place, mind you. He simply wanted to play it safe and double-check everything so he wouldn't have any nasty surprises later on.

Now that all the testing and thinking had been neatly finished, it was also time to end the kiss. Surely Todoroki had kissed Bakugou for just as long as he had been kissed that afternoon, right? Todoroki wanted to think so, but he had gotten distracted halfway through his internal countdown and lost track of time all over again. He had no idea if it was just his personal experience or if this was a feature of the act of kissing itself, but it seemed to be quite hard to think clearly while he was doing it.

After what felt like a lifetime but also an agonisingly short period, Todoroki slowly withdrew both his mouth and body, leaving a small wall of air between them. As he took a deep breath to even out his breathing rhythm, his eyes met with Bakugou's, who had been left equally as breathless by all of that smooching. Todoroki already had a small suspicion of it, given how hot he had felt from that short distance, but he was now visually confirming that Bakugou's face was redder than he had ever seen it before. Even when he was fuming mad at someone had his demonic features not been this brightly colourful.

".....maybe I should do it again……" mumbled Todoroki under his breath, his eyes glued to the captivating scene unfolding before him. He swallowed down the hard lump forming in his throat like he was keeping something well locked and repressed in the pits of his stomach. Before he could gather his thoughts and bring some clarity to all of that, however, a vice-like grip captured the upper portion of his face, rendering his eyes blind.

"L-Like hell you are…!" hissed Bakugou at the same time he straightened his arm and, as a result, pushed Todoroki's head and upper body away from him. "'The heck is wrong with you all of a sudden!? Maybe I really should send you to the hospital for a couple of days! Something is definitely wrong with your brain!"

“No, my brain is okay and so am I,” reassured Todoroki, slowly raising his arms up in the air as a display of both surrender and innocence. So long as Bakugou didn’t squeeze his cranium with any more strength than he already had, he wouldn’t need a visit to the hospital. “I won’t do anything else, so can you let go of me? This position is pretty rough on my neck…”

“Fuck no, you’re on time out right now, deal with it!” Bakugou growled threateningly, his fingers sinking into Todoroki’s temples some more. His arm also remained as straight as an arrow, which kept Todoroki’s upper body in a backwards bent position that indeed looked very uncomfortable for his spine. Bakugou didn’t feel even a single drop of guilt or pity over it; his coworker was simply getting a little taste of the consequences his crazy actions had brought about. He sighed tiredly. “What were you even thinking, doing something like that out of the blue!? Did you get hit by some stupid Quirk or something while I wasn’t watching!?”

“No, I was just trying it out, to make sure I could do it whenever needed from now on,” calmly explained Todoroki, despite the precarious position he was in.

“That makes zero sense! Trying out what!?” angrily demanded Bakugou, moving his arm left and right again and again to see if he could shake some sense into Todoroki’s empty brain. He could tell there was something of the correct size inside his skull, since he didn’t hear any rattling sounds coming from there, but better safe than sorry.

“Kissing you,” said Todoroki yet again with the leisure of someone commenting on their lunch or any such trivial matters. “I wanted to test it out when it’s just the two of us to make sure I can do it properly when someone starts questioning our relationship. You know, like you did with my father.”

“I-I told you that was just a one-time kind of thing!!!” Bakugou hissed, nearly tripping over his own words due to the intense heat once again

assaulting his whole face.

“Why? It’s an easy, quick way to prove that we truly are in a relationship, isn’t it?” pointed out Todoroki, unfortunately unable to tilt his head due to the monstrous grip keeping him immobile. “No one will be able to accuse us of lying if we kiss right in front of them. After all, neither Dynamight nor Shouto are the type to go around kissing random people for no good reason. That makes it even more believable than an official piece of paper. Besides, we’re already married. A married couple can kiss, right? Then I don’t see why we can’t do it too.”

“Yeah, that makes… zero… sense…?” sighed Bakugou at first, but his voice sounded more and more uncertain as time went on. The kiss they had shared while talking with Endeavor had indeed worked like a charm, even though the stubborn old man had been so adamant about not believing their claims or the copy of the marriage certificate they had brought with them. It was also undeniable that he wasn’t the type to kiss other people in public or in private, as his lack of salacious scandals proved. The same sort of applied to Todoroki, even though there had been a rumour or two about him being involved with this or that woman - rumours that were always quickly disproven by all parties involved. All of that combined made kissing as effective a tool as Todoroki claimed it to be. “...Huh… That might actually save us a fuckton of time that would otherwise be spent arguing back and forth with random extras…”

“That’s exactly what I was thinking,” said Todoroki, changing one of his raised hands into a thumbs-up. “It will also make us look like any ordinary couple, which will, in turn, make you seem more human than god. To sum it up, it helps both my side of our deal and yours.”

“I… guess that’s true,” conceded Bakugou at long last, his grip slowly softening until he finally let go of Todoroki’s face entirely. Nearly 50% of their ‘mission’ revolved around them pretending to be in a relationship, much like actors participating in a play or a TV show. If those romantic acts didn’t mean anything when actors were doing them, then the same would also apply to their case, since they were

doing it purely for the sake of the deal they had made. Besides, they were both on the same page when it came to their mission. Thanks to that, kissing wouldn't be that big of an issue if they mutually agreed they didn't have a problem with it. Bakugou crossed his arms over his chest and tilted his head just the slightest, not fully satisfied with that thought process but nevertheless unable to come up with any reasons to decline it. "Let's keep that as a last resort, though, or else it would get overused real fast."

"Okay," acknowledged Todoroki, finally able to nod his head along to his heart's content. Strangely enough, he felt as giddy now as he had felt while he was kissing Bakugou. Was he perhaps still feeling some residual effects of the kiss, since it had carried on for so long? All of those sensations and thoughts felt so weird and foreign to Todoroki, but he couldn't bring himself to dislike them either. *Well, I'm sure that will go away once I'm more used to kissing Bakugou.*

"Alright, now that that's decided and we've created a plan for both the press conference and the moving-in process, it's time you get the hell out of here and let me go to sleep, damn it!" Bakugou hissed, putting on his usual menacing frown on his face as he shooed Todoroki away with his hands. Had Todoroki not obediently gotten up from the sofa right away, he would have started kicking his leg next. But since he did, Bakugou also got up, keeping his suspicious gaze perpetually on his unwelcome guest out of concern he'd come up with yet another conversational topic.

Fortunately, though, Todoroki started to silently walk towards the entrance area without any complaints, always closely followed by Bakugou. Only when he saw him putting on his shoes and opening the front door did Bakugou let out a small sigh of relief and drop his guard.

"I'll let you know if there are any problems with doing our press conference at my father's hero agency," added Todoroki, holding onto the side of the door with his hand to keep it from closing. Most of his body was still inside Bakugou's apartment, though, so it wasn't as if he was at risk of having it slammed on his face yet again. That suited him

just fine.

“Yeah, yea-” Much like earlier, Bakugou dismissively acknowledged his words while also actively trying to get him outside once and for all. But the moment he took a step closer to push Todoroki into the empty corridor, his mouth was momentarily silenced by a pair of lips. Bakugou’s moody instinct kicked in right away, and his clenched fist lunged forward at the speed of light.

Todoroki was already expecting this sort of reaction, however. He easily sidestepped and avoided that tough fist by this really tiny gap.

“I told you to save that for a last resort, didn’t I!?” hissed Bakugou, his crimson eyes tightening into a burning glare. “Don’t think I won’t gut punch you in public if you dare to cross the line!”

“Practice makes perfect, right?” pointed out Todoroki, his head innocently cocked to the side while he stared at Bakugou with the expressionless gaze of a child who had just been chastised for stealing some candies. “If we don’t seem to be used to it, people might get suspicious about us. We have supposedly been dating for three years, after all.”

“Hmph! I know that! I’m not dumb!” Bakugou barked in retaliation, his frowning face becoming even more scrunched up with a pout. He pointed his index finger at Todoroki while using his other hand to slowly close his front door. “But that doesn’t mean I will let myself be used and manipulated by a dense mutt who just learned a new trick and now keeps repeating it whenever he feels like it! You already know you can do it, so stop doing it when it’s not needed! You’re lowering its ‘last resort’ value! Idiot!”

With that last half-hearted insult, Bakugou slammed the door shut with a loud bang. He couldn’t quite tell if the muffled ‘okay’ he heard

coming from the other side of the door was just his imagination or if it had been real. Whatever might be the case, he couldn't care less about it. Bakugou stomped back inside his living room area and then made a beeline to his bedroom, mumbling and cursing under his breath the whole way there.

By the time he reached his bed, Bakugou had cooled down enough to think with a clearer mind and a peaceful heartbeat. His earlier confused thoughts resurfaced, but just like before, he was unable to find anything wrong with anything that had been said and done. He had this nagging feeling that something was missing or being overlooked, but he couldn't figure out what that something was, no matter how much he pondered over it.

Not knowing the answer to something was extremely rare for Bakugou, who had always managed to come up with a solution or a plan for everything he was involved in. The fact that he couldn't figure out what was the missing 'something' was more frustrating than having to deal with idiots all day long. But at the same time, it also led him to think that maybe he was simply over-analysing and overthinking the question. Maybe the question itself didn't exist in the first place. Maybe he was pondering about nothing whatsoever. Who even knew? Bakugou didn't, that's for sure.

"Argh, whatever! I'll just keep focusing on arresting all of those lunatics and screw everything else!" screamed Bakugou as he frantically ruffled his own hair. There was no use in stressing himself out because of an unofficial mission. It wouldn't solve anything, and it also wouldn't make his problems disappear as if by magic. As such, he was better off just going with the flow and using whatever might be around him to his benefit. "If kissing that idiot helps me catch those lunatics just one day faster, then that's what I'll do! It's just bait, so who cares? I for sure don't care! I don't care at all, not even a tiny little bit! So long as it doesn't get in my way, it's as neutral to me as the air I freakin' breathe! Besides, he's right! We're married, and married people do stuff like that! It's nothing out of the ordinary! So from now on, I won't give a single fuck about any of that stuff! There, done!"

Once he reached the end of his rapid-fire rant, Bakugou took a couple of deep breaths to even his breathing rhythm. As he exhaled all the air accumulated inside his lungs, silence and tranquillity returned to his dim bedroom.

“Okay, time to go to sleep,” calmly said Bakugou under his breath, ready to restart his bedtime routine after the unexpected interruption.

With that, Bakugou successfully compartmentalised that entire monologue and everything associated with it into a small box stored away in a corner deep inside of his subconscious. His first day as a married man was also his last day walking around in circles trying to figure out what exactly that nagging feeling was trying to tell him. Perhaps sensing that it was about to be silenced and ignored from now on, the nagging feeling redirected one final message to its creator.

‘Good luck, you’ll really need it.’

Chapter 12

Todoroki's weekend ended up being, in all honesty, the most bizarre but interesting weekend of his whole life.

He was on his usual work shift both days, which he used to his benefit to set up the press conference needed for the marriage announcement. This brought about the bizarre but interesting event #1 - dealing with his father.

On his wedding day, Todoroki only interacted with him one more time after his and Bakugou's conversation with Enji. He wanted to make sure their holiday request was being taken seriously, so before he left the hero agency, he passed by his office to check how things were going. Todoroki got a moody 'I'm doing it as we speak' and nothing else, which he deemed to be acceptable for the most part. Back then, Enji was probably still processing the news, hence why that interaction had been so unassuming and peaceful.

But things changed drastically on the following day. As soon as Todoroki set foot inside the lobby area of the prestigious hero agency, he was readily notified by Burnin that the big boss wanted to talk with him. It went without saying that he already knew what to expect out of that. And his suspicion was well warranted, since the first thing Enji told him once he walked into his office was that he wanted to see every single document they had gotten out of their courthouse wedding. Todoroki had already given him a copy of the marriage certificate, but Enji told him that wasn't good enough - he wanted the entire documentation, be it the documents Todoroki had to fill in, be it those that had been written by the judge who officiated their marriage. He wasn't entirely sure how the courthouse operated in that regard, but something told Todoroki that it would be impossible to get all of those documents, even if just as a copy.

"Heh, then I guess you aren't actually married for real, are you?" was Enji's smug response to Todoroki pointing that out.

Whether it was because of his competitive streak or something else, Todoroki wasn't really sure, but hearing his father say that really annoyed him. It annoyed him like he had never felt annoyed before - so much so, he felt little sparks and flames creeping out from the left side of his body. However, losing his patience wouldn't help him in any way. After taking a long, deep breath to cool down his mind and body, Todoroki shot right back at Enji.

"I'm not really sure how to get those papers. Why don't you show me how it's done by giving me a copy of all the paperwork you did when you married Mom?"

It was an instant checkmate. Enji mumbled and fumbled for a couple of minutes, saying that things were done a bit differently when he had gotten married. But since he was eventually forced to admit that even he had no idea how to request access to those documents, Todoroki ended the conversation right there and then by telling his father for the millionth time to simply wait for their family register to be updated. He'd be able to see if his son had truly gotten married or not then.

After that humiliating defeat, Enji switched to a different strategy - to keep Todoroki under constant surveillance in hopes of catching him and his lies red-handed. Wherever Todoroki went, Enji also found an excuse to be there. First, it was looking for a missing item in the changing room, then wanting to check the physical condition of their newest sidekicks in the training area, followed by asking the receptionist about the current volume of official letters and job requests the hero agency was receiving while Todoroki was going through his task list for the day with the staff member responsible for combing through the agency's mail. Todoroki pretended not to see him in all of those instances and simply went on with his business as usual.

It got a bit more cumbersome when Enji also followed him outside, with the excuse of doing an official audit on every single field agent

they currently employed at the hero agency, starting immediately with Shouto. With that, Enji spent the rest of Todoroki's work shift shadowing him from a distance, clipboard in hand to take notes on everything of importance that he witnessed.

He was particularly vigilant when Todoroki bumped into Kaminari, who was out and about enjoying his day off. Fortunately, such an encounter ended up benefiting their mission since Kaminari suddenly pulled out a small gift bag from one of his shopping bags and gave it to Todoroki, claiming that it was his wedding gift to the two of them. Honestly, he had no idea how he should interpret such a gift or even what to do with it, but it did have a visible impact on Enji, so maybe it was fine? Plus, Kaminari probably only did it as some silly prank or to tease them, given the circumstances. That made Todoroki conclude that it would be for the best if he kept such an offering a secret from his 'husband' or else Bakugou would probably flip and find a way to covertly assassinate Kaminari… Yes, such a gruesome outcome would definitely make him even more popular with his villain cult following, so that wedding gift needed to stay a secret for the remainder of their marriage, no matter what…

Anyway.

The day felt long and stuffy due to the watchful gaze constantly glued to his back, but such a nightmare eventually came to a close. Just as Todoroki was about to end his shift, Burnin swooped in and dragged Enji back to his office so he could deal with all the paperwork he had been neglecting the whole day.

That was Todoroki's Saturday. Sunday was much the same, too.

None of Enji's schemes had much effect on him or the integrity of their mission. Most of his communication with Bakugou was done through texting, due to the nature of their work, and now that he was aware that his 'husband' lived quite literally a floor away from him, it was extremely easy to visit him in person if there was anything he

needed to discuss in a more detailed manner.

That led to the bizarre but interesting event #2 - his relationship with Bakugou. Well, nothing much had changed between them, if Todoroki was to really think about it. They still got along as well as they did before this mission. They weren't the type to randomly text and call other people, so, just like before, their communication could be summarised as 'the bare minimum'. Since Todoroki was in charge of setting up the press conference at his hero agency, all he had to do was give some occasional updates to keep Bakugou aware of how that portion of the mission was going. Todoroki also didn't have that many challenges with that, even with Enji's constant surveillance, and as such, even his updates were short and to the point. All in all, it was the textbook 'professional relationship' that was so common in human society.

The one thing that made his relationship with Bakugou be included in this short lil' list of his was the fact that, you guessed it, they were now married. The title that came alongside the marriage certificate seemed to have caused this unusual reaction in Todoroki, for some reason. He couldn't even give it a name; he just knew it was different from his previous 'normal'. Maybe that was simply something that every man experienced as they got used to their new marital status. He wasn't acquainted with enough married people to go to them and ask about it, though. But since, deep down, he didn't necessarily dislike or mind these minute changes, Todoroki wasn't that worried about it.

The biggest change that Todoroki had taken notice of so far was his daily routine. When in his regular work shift, which kept him occupied from 9 AM until 6 PM six days a week, he usually went straight home or passed by his mother's and sister's new home to pick up some food for his dinner. That was about it. Occasionally, he'd meet with some of his friends or fellow UA graduates, but that was becoming more and more of a rarity as they got busier with their pro hero careers and moved to all sorts of new cities and locations.

This weekend, however, just as he was finishing his dinner, he

developed the habit of texting Bakugou and then coming to knock on his door five minutes later. Obviously, he was always greeted by a furious glare and a couple of colourful cusses, but Bakugou never actually told him to go away and leave him alone. He grumbled and bitched about it, yes, but he would let him in after a couple of minutes of that. These impromptu visits weren't anything special; they simply sat down on the sofa and discussed how things related to their mission were going.

That was how Todoroki discovered that Bakugou had already made some adjustments to his work schedule, exchanging the day off he had slotted for that Sunday for a work day to tie up any loose ends before he went on his week-long holiday. Such forethought and fastidiousness were not that unusual for a perfectionist like Bakugou. He made sure to leave his work in the most optimal condition, making everyone's lives easier as they scrambled around trying to compensate for the huge gaping hole his absence would create. And with Todoroki also taking time off at the same time, the hole was twice as big. The current peaceful era was the only reason the two of them could afford such a luxury. On the flip side, they had been vital players in the creation of said peaceful era, so perhaps this week-long break was just them reaping some of the fruits of all of their hard labour.

Their conversations also didn't last for very long, as it was mostly a recap of what they had already talked about through messages, plus some occasional unrelated topics that naturally sprouted. Todoroki didn't know how Bakugou felt about it, but he truly enjoyed the short half hour or so that he spent at his apartment. It was the perfect way to unwind after a busy day at work. Would these conversations remain or even expand once they moved in together? They had previously discussed the possibility of adjusting their work schedules from now on so they would match as much as possible, aiming to at least have the same day off every week that they could use to further advance their unofficial mission. If they succeeded at that, the time they could spend together would naturally increase exponentially.

Was he being too greedy for looking forward to doing precisely that? Maybe so. But Bakugou didn't seem to mind his selfishness as much as he made it sound. Bakugou, too, was a selfish person, after all. Most

people would think that made him not all that compatible with Todoroki's own selfishness, as it meant they would clash constantly to decide whose selfish whim came out on top, but his actions and words so far proved otherwise. Bakugou was acclimating himself to Todoroki's selfish requests and actions surprisingly fast and with minimal pushback.

The best example of that was all the effort they were putting into genuinely looking like a newlywed couple. Bakugou's once-in-a-lifetime kiss, which was used as a last resort against Enji, had accidentally unlocked a viable manoeuvre they could use on command as needed. Todoroki had tested it out and discovered he didn't mind kissing or being physically affectionate with Bakugou. Although he never got a clear answer from him about that, Bakugou was also on board with using such a trick if it was truly necessary. However, neither of them had any acting experience, and Todoroki wasn't a good liar in the first place. Someone with a keen eye or loads of romantic experience would easily be able to see through their awkward couple-y interactions. Their background story said they had been dating for three years already, so they needed to look the part with every single interaction they had in front of other people.

As such, Todoroki took it upon himself to get them used to acting like a couple in as short a time as possible. For the sake of their mission, of course. No nefarious or dubious intentions were involved in it. All of it was purely part of the deal they had made. He was certain that once he was used to kissing Bakugou and holding his hand and touching his body, much like a lover would, the giddy sensation he got out of the novelty of this situation would eventually fade into normalcy. He couldn't tell if Bakugou also experienced that giddy sensation or not, but he, too, was slowly learning to accept such acts as just another part of their mission.

On day 1 of Todoroki suddenly kissing Bakugou, he had to avoid a gut-punch. On day 2, he got his cheek pinched and pulled while being told off. On day 3, Bakugou groaned in exasperation before picking up the conversation where they had left it off. So yes, progress. Slow but constant, riddled with positive feedback and sprinkled with a healthy dose of restrained excitement.

Given the current track record, Todoroki could barely wait to find out what day 4 would be like. Fortunately, he wouldn't have to wait too long to find out.

His weekend went by in the blink of an eye, as busy but excited as he was, and the so-awaited Monday had arrived. The day they would make their marriage public knowledge was finally here.

Even though Todoroki wasn't a morning person and would be very sluggish in the first few moments after waking up, he quite literally jumped out of his bed the moment his alarm clock rang the first musical note. He didn't need to be in any rush, as he was technically already on his vacation, but he still couldn't help himself. Todoroki got all ready to go in record time, all while constantly taking peeks at his smartphone or the digital clock in his bedroom.

The press conference had been scheduled to take place at 9:30 AM, allowing Endeavor's hero agency ample time to prepare the conference room and ensure that journalists and reporters had all their equipment set up. That meant that Todoroki also had plenty of time to get there.

"I wonder if it would be okay to pick up Bakugou from his apartment…" mumbled Todoroki under his breath after having spent a good couple of minutes absentmindedly staring at the screen of his smartphone, secretly hoping that would make time fly by faster. Bakugou was also already on his week-long vacation, and with the type of daily routine he had, he probably had been awake for far longer than Todoroki had. Plus, they were currently in the same building and would be heading to the same location, most likely around the same time. Wouldn't it be more efficient if they left together?

That rational conclusion was all Todoroki needed to start acting on it.

He grabbed his smartphone, wallet and house keys and headed straight to the entrance area after turning off the TV that had been dubbing as background noise while he impatiently waited. His heart was beating faster than usual by the time he reached Bakugou's front door, but that was probably because he had run all the way there. He rang the doorbell and then knocked a couple of times on the door, the same ritual he had developed these past few visits. Seconds that felt like minutes went by before that door was finally open.

"You're coming by awfully early today…" grumbled Bakugou, his face scrunched up with a suspicious frown. "You better not be here to give me bad news, 'cuz if you are, I'm gonna make you regret having been left in charge of organising the press conference."

"Bad news? No, I don't have anything of the sort," said Todoroki, his head slightly tilted in confusion. He couldn't think of a single reason why there could be any problems regarding the press conference, and he also hadn't received my messages or phone calls from his coworkers warning him of such. "I just figured it would be more efficient if we went to my hero agency together."

"Oh, is that so?" Bakugou's moody expression immediately softened into a more neutral frown. He gave a small tap to the door with his hand to open it wider and gave a quick jerk with his chin to urge Todoroki to come on in. "We'd better get going soon, then. I can already see your daddy dearest creating a stink the moment he spots me in there."

"Yeah, he's also not all that happy with me for taking an entire week off from work because of the wedding he still thinks didn't really happen," sighed Todoroki, stepping inside Bakugou's apartment and closing the door behind himself. Both of their apartments had the same layout and size, giving it a weird deja vu feel to it the first few times Todoroki had been there. Now, he could breeze through the entire apartment like it was his own, even though he hadn't exactly ventured to more private areas, like Bakugou's bedroom. "I think he also doesn't fully believe we're about to move in together."

“Heh! Yeah, that sounds about right,” snorted Bakugou, the corners of his lips twisting upwards just the slightest to shape a knowing smirk. “I guess the press conference is gonna be as effective with the general population as it will be with Endeavor. By the way, I’m giving you fair warning, but don’t be surprised if some of our morons text you right after we’re done with this thing to thank you for winning them a bet. I can feel it in my bones that those idiots have been having the time of their lives thanks to our mission…”

Yeah, that also sounds about right, confirmed Todoroki in the back of his mind. The fact that Kaminari had gone out of his way to get them a ‘wedding gift’ more than proved that their former classmates had been talking about their mission behind their backs. Some most likely did it out of concern for them, but a select few were definitely going to make a private spectacle out of it. So long as they kept that low key and didn’t cause them any trouble, Todoroki didn’t mind it much. They had already received the background script that Bakugou had created, so, hopefully, they already knew what to say and do if they also got swarmed by curious journalists, reporters and paparazzi.

While they still had a bit over an hour until the start of the press conference, since they both agreed that arriving early would be better for their true cause, Bakugou quickly finished what he had been doing before Todoroki’s arrival, and they then departed from his apartment together. Thanks to Bakugou always thinking three moves ahead, a taxi was already parked by the sidewalk by the time they arrived at the apartment complex’s entrance area.

The taxi trip was quick and silent. What they were about to do was an extremely risky move and could have irreversible consequences to their pro hero careers; they could use some last moments of peace and quiet before they imploded with their current lives.

Arriving at Endeavor’s hero agency this time was not the same experience they had had just the previous week. It was well past 8 AM, the time when most people were commuting to their jobs. The

streets were certainly busier thanks to the increased volume of people following their usual routes to their workplaces, but it was unusual for a crowd to gather in front of the main entrance of the humongous skyscraper Todoroki worked at. Bakugou and Todoroki didn't need to exchange a quick glance with one another to know what had created that flock of humans. And even if they didn't know what was happening from the get-go, they would quickly reach the right answer simply by observing all the equipment that some of those people were carrying inside the hero agency.

"Ugh, I already feel like going back home…" grumbled Bakugou, his voice nearly inaudible amidst the noisy crowd. He had made sure to dress up in a way that kept his identity well protected, but with that many people there, being identified was only a matter of time. That went doubly so with Todoroki with him. While the mass media invited to the press conference weren't aware of what would be discussed, they did know pro hero Shouto was the one who organised it. Social media was already exploding with curious questions and wild theories, thanks to someone leaking to the internet that such a press conference would be happening soon. While Bakugou had already gotten used to dealing with journalists and the like, he wasn't a big fan of them. If he could avoid them as much as possible, he would without thinking twice. He grabbed Todoroki's lower arm and started pulling him towards the opposite direction from the bustling crowd. "It's too troublesome to come inside through the front door. Let's use the side door meant for deliveries."

"Sure," acknowledged Todoroki, already fishing his wallet from his pants' pocket to get the key card used to unlock said door. To get there without being spotted, they ended up needing to walk around to the opposite end of the building, where they then switched to a small side road that was connected to the side door meant to be used by staff only. Halfway down that road was a bar gate, which blocked access to the remainder of the road and, hence, the side door. A security guard stood next to it, who promptly greeted them once he spotted Todoroki there.

Compared to what would have happened had they gone inside through the main entrance, Todoroki and Bakugou made their way in

very leisurely and without wasting any time deflecting questions and cameras.

“Oh-oh~ The main character is finally here!” said Burnin, quickly spotting Todoroki once they reached the lobby area. She had been there managing all of those people and making sure they were guided to the conference room and nowhere else. The last thing they needed was a rogue paparazzi exploring the tall building unsupervised. She unconsciously arched an eyebrow at the companion Todoroki had brought along for the second time in a few days. “You’re also here, Dynamight?”

“You haven’t told them yet?” asked Bakugou in response to that question, redirecting his gaze from Burnin to Todoroki.

“I figured it would be easier to inform everyone at my hero agency at the same time,” explained Todoroki, not fully understanding why Bakugou immediately rolled his eyes at him. “Should I have told them ahead of time?”

“Honestly, since this is you we’re talking about here, I have no idea which option would have been better,” sighed Bakugou, his saintly patience getting the first test of the day. He beckoned Burnin to come closer with his hand and then lowered the volume of his voice. “Try not to be too loud and just listen. We got married last week, and this press conference is meant to announce-”

“WHAT!?” loudly yelped Burnin, her eyes nearly jumping out of their sockets with how wide they had suddenly opened. Her booming voice obviously caught the attention of the majority of people inside the lobby area, including the journalists and reporters who were signing in and carrying their stuff to the conference room. The once bustling lobby was now considerably quieter, filled with strained ears trying to listen in on their conversation.

“I told you not to be too loud, didn’t I!?” hissed Bakugou, doing his best not to add any volume to his voice despite wanting nothing more than to bite Burnin’s head off as freely as he felt like. “That’s what’s up, so keep it to yourself until the press conference starts, alright?”

“‘The heck, when exactly did you two start dating?” promptly asked Burnin in a small voice, pushing the two pro heroes’ backs to guide them to a more private corner of the lobby area. “Is this why Endeavor has been in such a pissy mood lately and doing all of these unnecessary things rather than his god damned job?”

“We’ve been together for three years now,” explained Todoroki, quickly glancing at Bakugou before providing that pre-programmed reply. “As for my father… Well, you know how he is… He doesn’t believe we got married despite having brought him a copy of our marriage certificate and shown him some other pretty irrefutable evidence.”

“I don’t blame him, you’re springing this on us so suddenly…” sighed Burnin, nodding her head along in solidarity to her boss. That solidarity ended pretty fast, however, and she returned to her energetic self soon after, jabbing her elbow a handful of times on the side of Bakugou’s torso. “You really are good at keeping a low profile, huh, kid? Keeping a whole relationship secret for three whole years while having a target on your back as far as those pesky paparazzi are concerned is miracle-worthy.”

“What can I say, I’m good at everything I do,” snorted Bakugou, proudly puffing out his chest as a mischievous smirk popped up on his face.

“You smug little rascal!” barked Burnin with a laugh. She then strongly patted both of their shoulders simultaneously, not sparing in the strength department. “Either way, congrats to you two! Also… good luck dealing with Endeavor. Hit him hard all at once so you can enjoy your lil’ honeymoon period without him nagging you!”

“That’s exactly our plan,” deadpanned Todoroki, expressionlessly giving a thumbs-up at Burnin. As he lowered his hand, he glanced at the main entrance, which was still welcoming a constant stream of people. He was starting to wonder if perhaps he had invited far more people than he should have… “How are things going so far? Are there any problems with the prep work being done or the location?”

“Nope, everything is going really well, actually,” said Burnin, giving a reassuring smile to her junior. “I think since you didn’t say anything about what the press conference is for, everyone is on their best behaviour so they don’t get kicked out of here before the big reveal. The conference room is getting pretty full, but that’s mainly because of all the cameras and other equipment the cameramen are lugging around. I’m pretty sure some of them are getting ready to livestream the whole press conference if it turns out to be about some bombastic news. And since the news is truly insane, you'd better get ready to be stalked for days on end and get stopped everywhere you go, alone or together. Try not to blow up with anyone until things cool down, ‘kay, Dynamight?”

“Hmph! I know that better than anyone else, thank you very much,” scoffed Bakugou as he turned his head in the opposite direction. Thanks to that, he was able to spot a certain someone rushing towards them like a bull running straight at a red mantle. “Geh… He’s already here too…”

“SHOOOOOUUUUUTOOOOOO…!” Came Enji’s booming voice, once again causing the entire lobby area to go completely silent - in fact, it went so silent that it would be possible to hear a feather being dropped. The only sound that could still be heard was his thundering footsteps as he made a direct beeline to his youngest son. Enji stopped right in front of the three of them, his ice blue eyes initially glaring daggers at Bakugou before he scoffed and focused all of his attention on the person that mattered the most. “So you’re really doing this.”

“Of course I am. I can’t keep our marriage a secret forever, nor do I

want to," calmly retorted Todoroki, his voice steady but icy cold. "We'll be announcing it publicly, right here, right now, and then proceed with our plans to move in together."

"Tsk! So you're still insisting that fake piece of paper is real," Enji grumbled after clicking his tongue in annoyance. "I don't know why you're keeping this charade going when we all know it's just a lie. I already told you I'm not falling for your cheap tricks. I know you're not really dating, let alone married! So stop this nonsense once and for all, before you damage your reputation as a pro hero!"

"We are married for real, and the copy of the marriage certificate is also real," sighed Todoroki, starting to get a bit tired of repeating the same words to his stubborn father again and again. Since this was one of the possibilities they had discussed during their impromptu meetings, he already knew what he had to do. Without once breaking eye contact with Enji, Todoroki took a sideways step and drew closer to Bakugou, using this new position to shield them from other onlookers as he grabbed the hand of the man he was married to. "Just because you weren't the one who chose my partner doesn't mean you can unilaterally decide that the official ceremony we held is not real. I keep telling you to just wait a few more days, and you can go check our updated family register yourself, whether in person or by requesting the info online."

"I don't need to check anything, my eyes alone can see the obvious truth!" hissed Enji, accusingly pointing at his son, but mostly at the blonde next to him. "I have no idea how Shouto convinced you to do all of this, but his plan has clearly failed already, Bakugou. If you follow through with this press conference, you'll just be inviting more trouble into your daily life! Because I for sure won't rest until I expose this lie you're trying so hard to keep going, that I can guarantee you!"

"Oh yeah? Be my guest then." Bakugou simply shrugged at Enji's hostile words, showing no signs of being bothered or intimidated by any of it. When faced with a good, hard challenge, there was only one option to take - accept it head-on with a victorious smirk on his face. "I know very well what is true and what is a lie. Good luck proving

whatever paranoid thoughts are crossing your mind. Meanwhile, I'll be enjoying my honeymoon with a clear conscience, my dear *father-in-law* ."

"You…!" barked Enji, his frown getting even more creased at hearing those mocking words. He took a step towards that haughty little devil, but his son acted just as fast and protectively placed himself in front of Bakugou.

"If you can't behave yourself and talk like an adult, I won't let you be present during the press conference," warned Todoroki, his expressionless features starting to show some angry undertones. "This might be your hero agency, but I was the one who organised the press conference. I have the final say on who stays and who goes."

"Uh…" Hearing that warning was like getting doused by a large bucket of ice-cold water. It got Enji to hesitate nearly instantly, and after a couple of tense seconds, he backed away for good. Not because he wanted to, but because there was no way forward that didn't damage his relationship with his youngest son. Enji was far from convinced about the veracity of Todoroki's sudden romantic relationship with Bakugou, but he needed to be strategic with how to prove that it was all just a poorly thought-out plan to decline their arranged marriage family tradition. "Tsk… Have it your way…"

After grumbling those moody words, Enji turned his back on them and stomped towards the nearest elevator, much like a child throwing a tantrum would have.

"Um… Just for the record, you guys are married for real… right?" asked Burnin with a certain hesitation, her eyes shooting back and forward between Enji's sulking back and the two young men next to her. It wasn't that she didn't trust Todoroki's word on it, especially after he went through all the trouble of setting up a press conference with such a high number of journalists and reporters. However, she had to agree that this announcement was extremely sudden. As far as

she was aware, there hadn't been any signs that Todoroki had been dating Bakugou this whole time, and the same could be said about Bakugou.

"Yes, we're married for real," confirmed Todoroki, his voice dead serious as he carefully observed his father walking away. He unconsciously squeezed Bakugou's hand a bit more tightly, but when he noticed what he was doing, he let go right away. A sigh escaped from his lips, his tall body becoming a little bit more deflated now that things were calmer around them. "He's just too stubborn and stuck in his old ways to accept it."

"Hmph! We already knew it was going to be like this, and yet, we still got married, didn't we?" said Bakugou with an unbothered shrug of his shoulders. "Just let him sulk like a baby, if that's what makes him happy. Meanwhile, we're double-checking everything. I don't want to be caught off guard by any nasty 'surprises' that stubborn old mule might come up with. Let's go, Todoroki."

"Oh. Okay." Despite him being the one who was caught off guard by Bakugou's words, Todoroki recovered quickly and started following him after offering Burnin one last acknowledging and grateful nod.

They're just faking it, he says… The abrupt ending to their conversation left Burnin standing all alone in that more secluded area of the lobby. That gave her plenty of time to see her boss retreat back to his office and her two juniors move towards the support room adjacent to the conference room. After a while, she sighed and went back to her role as supervisor. *If you ask me, that smile Shouto immediately got on his face when he heard Dynamight's encouraging words seemed pretty genuine, but meh, what do I know?*

Chapter 13

The conference room was filled to the brim with reporters and their camera crews, with the remaining little space being overtaken by their equipment. The big unknown over what exactly was about to be publicly discussed made the mood inside the spacious area as tense as in a cabinet meeting, whispering voices sombre with anxiety and curiosity.

Once the time announced finally came, a pair of side doors was finally opened to allow passage to the tables and chairs set up on a small podium area in the front portion of the conference room. Almost as if by reflex, the room was filled with the flashing lights and clicking sounds of photos being taken in quick succession. Albeit more silent, the cameras with livestream capacity were also promptly turned on to accompany the people moving from the adjacent side room to the honour seats in the podium.

“Wait, so Dynamight really is here?” “This press conference keeps getting weirder and weirder.” “Are they about to announce a new team-up?” “Can’t they tell us what is going on already? The suspense is killing me here!” “Why aren’t they wearing their hero costumes, like they usually do?”

The whispering grew more pronounced as not only Shouto, the pro hero responsible for organising the press conference, but also Dynamight appeared from the open doors and made a direct beeline to the seats set up. Opposite to what some thought would happen, the two of them were the only people who showed up.

It took a handful of seconds for Todoroki and Bakugou to take a seat and officially begin the so-awaited press conference.

“Thank you for coming here on such short notice. I won’t take too

much of your time," started Todoroki after adjusting the mic in front of him on the table. He briefly glanced at Bakugou, who was just sitting next to him as casually as he usually did in more private settings, before he went right to the point. "We requested this press conference for just one reason - to finally announce publicly that we got married. Yeah, that's all."

Both the whispering and the flashing lights stopped immediately at those words. A long stretch of silence ensued as the reporters and their cameramen looked at one another, wondering if they had just heard what they thought they had. Half of the room felt like they were having a mass hallucination, while the other half was wondering if the microphone wasn't working properly. After a good chunk of time had gone by, a reporter in his mid-30s finally destroyed the tense status quo.

"I-Is this part of some prank show?" he asked with one of his hands raised. Mass whispering broke out instantly, with people commenting back and forth about such a possibility. A few of them looked around the room, searching for cameras pointed at them, but it was impossible to tell for certain with so much video recording equipment currently inside the conference room.

"Tsk, do I look like the type to waste my time with such a stupid thing?" grumbled Bakugou, his eyebrow momentarily twitching in annoyance. That was a very fair point that the majority of the reporters and staff agreed on - Dynamight certainly wasn't the type of pro hero who participated in that sort of publicity stunt. However, rather than reassured, everyone looked more confused than ever. It was crystal clear that they were wondering if there was some sort of hidden meaning in that straight-to-the-point declaration, or if they had missed some sort of vital clue that unveiled such a mystifying sentence.

Words alone won't do it, huh… Todoroki deadpanned in the back of his mind, only letting out a small sigh outwardly. This press conference was going in the exact same direction as their initial conversation with Enji had. They had discussed the possibility of some people

questioning and doubting their claims of being newlyweds, but they didn't think about a scenario where *everyone* thought they were pulling a prank on, possibly, the entire world. *I guess we'll have to improvise and give them something no one can contest or doubt.*

All of the practice Todoroki had been accumulating these past three days was about to come in clutch and save their failing press conference. If this wasn't the moment where they deployed the 'last resort' tactic, then he had no idea when it should be.

Todoroki calmly got up from his seat, his hands pressed against the table as an aid. Bakugou arched an eyebrow and glanced sideways at him, but he was probably thinking he was just about to restore order inside the conference room and get all of those journalists and reports to focus back on them rather than on their wild theories. In a way, yes, Todoroki did want all eyes on them in preparation for his next move.

Once he had gotten what he wanted and the majority was expectantly waiting for his next declaration, or better yet, a proper explanation, Todoroki went for it. He leaned his upper body towards Bakugou at the same time he grabbed his chin and craned his face in his direction. From there, it was quite easy to kiss Bakugou, starting with just a chaste kiss but then going all out as the room exploded in a showy storm of surprised gasps, enthusiastic squeals and camera flashes.

Yes, that was the sort of reaction they had been aiming for. Pleased with the success of their 'last resort' manoeuvre, Todoroki ended up getting a bit too carried away and leaned more closely towards Bakugou. What he didn't take into account, however, was how unstable such a position was. With him standing and Bakugou sitting, Todoroki ended up pushing quite a lot of weight on his kissing partner's upper body. To make it worse, Todoroki doubled down on that later on, all while he meticulously tasted every nook and cranny of Bakugou's mouth. By the time Bakugou tried to compensate for that shift in weight by grabbing and clawing at the table with one of his hands, it was already too late.

Bakugou fell from the chair mid-kiss, his back and head hitting the podium floor while his legs were left half propped up against the chair, half sprawled in the air.

Every single cameraman and photographer was having a field day with all that was unfolding. Although the tables and chairs were currently blocking their view of Bakugou, they had captured every single detail of the Hollywood-grade kiss scene. Those who were livestreaming the press conference on several websites were getting bombarded by real-time comments and reactions from the public. Social media was probably being hit by a similar titanic wave of comments and posts.

With a single move, their marriage announcement went from a prank show to a massive reveal that was on the verge of breaking the internet. Later rumours even said that this news somehow managed to reach the inside of a certain prison, where a certain villain charged with harassing and attacking two UA students with his sticky Quirk a couple of years prior was seen celebrating the announcement with screams of 'I told you so! You said I was crazy, but I could see it coming from a million miles away!'

"Oh. Sorry," apologised Todoroki with his usual expressionless demeanour. He moved the now-empty chair out of his way and motioned his hand towards Bakugou to help him get back up. Bakugou, as expected, was glaring daggers at him, silently mouthing, 'I will get back at you for this humiliation,' while he grabbed Todoroki's hand and sat up on the podium.

They needed to wait a few minutes for everyone to calm down, and that gave them the necessary time to sit back down in their respective seats as if nothing had happened just now. Bakugou still had a massive frown on his face, but he tried to remain as focused on their mission as possible rather than on kicking the chair from under Todoroki and making him fall flat on his face, too.

“If you have any questions, this is your one and only chance ‘cuz I ain’t wasting any more of my time with these stupid formalities,” declared Bakugou, his arms crossed over his chest as he closely studied the crowd in front of them. He easily spotted pro hero Endeavor further down the room, close to one of the entrances to the conference room - he didn’t look all that happy about what had just happened, but he also didn’t seem to be preparing himself to crash the press conference. *Endeavor staying in his little corner, sulking and grumbling on his own, is the best outcome we can ask for. Plus, since these easily excited morons are reacting positively, he won’t have a chance to step in and declare it’s all a sham. Hah, serves you right!*

“How long have you been together, and why have you been keeping your relationship a secret this whole time?” asked a reporter right away, her hand raised high while the other was holding onto her mic. The cameraman shadowing her promptly switched the camera's focus from the reporter to the two pro heroes in response to her question.

“We started dating a bit over three years ago,” replied Todoroki without missing a beat. “As for why we kept it a secret, well…”

“Is it any of my business whether you’re dating someone or not?” Bakugou asked back, his crimson eyes pinpointing the reporter who asked that question. When she hesitantly shook her head and mumbled a ‘No, not really…’, he shrugged his shoulders. “There you have your answer. It’s none of my business who you date, so it’s also none of your business who we date. Next!”

“But you’re public figures and, in a roundabout way, public servants. The media attention and scrutiny aimed at people like you is completely different from us,” said another reporter, the smug look on his face hinting that he was trying to get a gotcha moment.

“Have you or anyone else seen me dating during my work hours?”

retorted Bakugou, a knowing smirk already appearing on his lips. “The answer is obviously no. What I do or don’t do while I’m off the clock is, again, none of anyone’s business, so long as I’m not breaking the law. As far as I’m aware, no law or rule says I can’t date or marry a coworker, right? Plus, being a public figure doesn’t mean I don’t get to have any privacy. If I wanted to have cameras shoved down my throat 24/7, I’d have become a livestreamer rather than a pro hero. Any other questions that aren’t related to me apparently having to abdicate from my right to privacy outside of my work hours, too?”

“When did you get married? Oh, and how long have you been planning your wedding?” excitedly asked a journalist, a voice recorder tightly clasped in her hand. “Are there any photos or videos of the ceremony you’d be able to share with us?”

“We got married this past Friday, and it was just your regular courthouse wedding. There aren’t any photos or videos to speak of,” explained Todoroki, giving his partner a break before he got too annoyed with the intrusive questions. He was fully aware of how much Bakugou despised them, given the massive stunts he constantly pulled just so he could avoid them. This press conference was going to benefit both sides of the mission, but that didn’t mean that Todoroki couldn’t take charge as much as possible to make sure it went about smoothly - even if he wasn’t that great of a conversationalist in the first place. “We’ve talked about getting married and moving in together every now and then, but we haven’t had any concrete plans up until now. Our wedding was as sudden to you as it was to us. However, that doesn’t change the fact that we both did something we have wanted to for a long time now. Most of our friends and coworkers will tell you as much, too.”

“Oh, so the pro heroes from your generation have been aware of your relationship right from the start?” asked the same journalist, her eyes sparkling with that piece of information. It showed on her face that the moment the press conference ended, she would immediately rush to one of their known friends to ask them a gazillion more questions.

“Of course they have,” said Todoroki with a short nod of his head.

“They have known us for so many years, there’s no way we’d be able to keep our relationship a secret from them. The same goes for our families… even if some of them are more stubborn than others.”

“Heh, I couldn’t have said it better,” snickered Bakugou, his gaze once again landing on Enji. It was quite unusual for Todoroki to be so verbally passive-aggressive, but it was a good way to pass the message ‘Don’t you dare try anything or I’ll drag *your* reputation through the mud’ without actually saying it out loud. *I bet Todoroki must have also noticed him there and decided to do a preemptive attack, rather than letting Endeavor take the initiative and then placate him. Not bad, not bad.*

“You’re not going to do a proper wedding ceremony, one that includes both of your families and friends?” asked a different journalist from the opposite end of the crowd.

“No, that would be too time-consuming and not a good match for our work schedules,” Todoroki explained after a small sigh. “For something like a proper wedding ceremony, we’d have to coordinate who would be attending and who would be continuing to keep our country safe from villains and other threats. Since so many of our close friends are pro heroes like us or work in the same industry, we’d be forced to make a lot of tough decisions. That’s not how we envision celebrating our happy moments with those dearest to us. That’s why we decided to simply have a courthouse wedding and then do the celebrations privately as our schedules allow it.”

“You mentioned moving in together,” asked another journalist, raising his hand up in the air as fast as lightning to make sure no one moved on from this conversational topic before he got it milked down of all pertinent questions. “Does that mean we will finally find out Dynamight’s address, after he managed to keep it a secret throughout his entire career?”

“Maybe, maybe not. Who knows?” said Bakugou with a leisurely shrug - even though on his face was a mischievous smirk that told

everyone watching that he was definitely up to no good. “However, one of the main reasons why we’ll be taking a week off from work starting today is so we can take our time moving into our new home. Whether you guys find out anything from that or not is really up to your stalker skills.”

“A whole week off!” gasped the same journalist who had been talking so animatedly with them earlier. An entire week of vacation was unheard of for these two pro heroes, and it showed, the way the whole room broke out into whispering once again. “Does that mean you have something special planned for your honeymoon!? Oh, never mind… That question is probably too intrusive…”

“See? This one gets it,” snorted Bakugou, pointing at that journalist in specific while skirting his eyes across the rest of the room. “Learn from her and then come back to talk to me. I might be a bit less menacing then and not tell you to eff off straight to your face.”

I think we should end this press conference here, Todoroki concluded in the back of his mind. If Bakugou was already switching to lecturing the reporters and journalists rather than answering or ignoring their questions, then the conversation would go downhill really fast, really soon. Plus, by the way that the journalist was blushing while stealing some occasional glances their way, Bakugou might have just inadvertently gained one more diehard fan. *We’ve said what needed to be said, humoured their questions according to the script we created beforehand and have made the reveals meant to end the press conference in a way that grabs the attention and piques the curiosity of mass media. Yeah, we can stop here.*

“What now?” asked Bakugou, halting his next dose of admonishments and restrained cusses when Todoroki grabbed the hand that was pointing at the crowd. He was looking for a proper answer made out of words, but what he got instead was Todoroki pulling his hand down without any rhyme or reason.

“It’s getting late, and we need to go sign the papers for our new home,” said Todoroki at long last after he was sent one too many confused looks by Bakugou. It wasn’t actually that late, as it wasn’t even 10 AM yet, but that was beside the point. They had other places to be now that their objective had been accomplished. To sum it up, there was no point in wasting more time chit-chatting with overly excited journalists. Todoroki got up from his seat, still holding Bakugou’s hand, and briefly bowed his head at the crowd he had personally invited there. “That’s all from us. Thank you for coming here.”

With that, Todoroki turned around and started walking towards the adjacent room they had been in prior to the start of the press conference, yanking Bakugou along with him.

“‘The heck is wrong with you all of a sudden?” asked Bakugou as he closely watched Todoroki closing the doors behind them. The whispering and shuffling of the crowd was completely drowned out with that.

“…? We said everything we wanted to say and baited them into following us around for the next few days. I figured this was a good spot to end the press conference,” said Todoroki, his head tilted to the side as he innocently looked at Bakugou with his mismatched puppy dog eyes. “Did you still want to add anything else to it?”

“No, not really…” grumbled Bakugou, part of him indeed relieved that the press conference nightmare was now over. He pulled his smartphone half out of his pocket and glanced at it. “It’s just that we ended it way earlier than we had planned. That means more time of us sneaking around trying to do our stuff while getting chased by hungry stalkers.”

“Can’t we just use the same tactics that you usually use to avoid them, while still giving them some occasional treats?” suggested Todoroki, walking across the room to a desk filled with several monitors. In

them, they could see several live feeds of the security cameras inside and outside the conference room. It seemed the journalists and reporters invited were already slowly trickling out of the room, orderly escorted by the staff members and sidekicks who were helping to manage the press conference. “You know, that misdirection thing we talked about a while ago.”

“That’s not how misdirection works, you dumbass,” groaned Bakugou with an exasperated eyeroll. “It’s not very effective when everyone is extremely keen on spotting you. They know we’re currently in here, so they’ll be paying close attention to all exits. Plus, they know where you live. You can bet we’ll be seeing a bunch of them near our apartment complex.”

“That’s still all within our expectations,” said Todoroki with a calm shrug. He pointed with his thumb at the monitors while adding, “Let’s just stay here for a little while longer and wait for most of them to leave the building. Some of them will stay to continue following us around, but I bet quite a few of them will turn their focus on interviews with people who know us well. That can be a good distraction on its own.”

“Ugh, fine,” conceded Bakugou after hearing that dose of arguments. He had had other plans in mind for how to skirt around the journalists and reporters keeping guard around Endeavor’s hero agency, but that would work out too. He walked alongside Todoroki to the sofas in the centre of the support room, meant to keep its guests comfortable as they waited in there. “The realtor knows we’ll be visiting them today to get all the paperwork done and receive the keys to the apartment. I know they won’t dare to give that apartment to someone else, even if some smartass tries to steal it from me. But the sooner we do all of this trivial stuff, the sooner we can start working on the real deal.”

“I know, I know,” sighed Todoroki, not minding all that much his coworker’s impatience. If he were to be honest, he was also really looking forward to moving in with Bakugou. Living just a floor away from one another was nice and convenient, but sharing the same living space would make everything ten times better and more

advantageous for the kind of goals they had in mind. To add to that, they have come up with a bunch of ways they can capitalise on the moving-in process itself. Todoroki was feeling as excited about that as the fact that he had found himself a flatmate in the least likely person. “Are you still up for what we discussed befo- Oh.”

Just as Todoroki was about to sit down on the sofa, Bakugou pulled a fast one on him without any warning and kicked the wooden frame of the sofa. The kick was strong enough to move the sofa backwards a handful of inches, causing Todoroki to fall on the hard, cold floor rather than the soft cushions he was aiming for.

“……?” With an expression equivalent to the human version of a question mark, Todoroki looked up at Bakugou from the floor, still in the process of grasping what exactly had just happened.

“That’s payback for making me fall off the chair,” scoffed Bakugou with a moody hmph, his face turning away from the confused stare directed at him. He then crossed his arms over his chest and started walking away.

“You’re so petty…” sighed Todoroki, fully aware that there was no use arguing with Bakugou when it came to his whimsical acts of revenge. He should consider himself lucky that this silly, elementary-school-kid-grade prank was all he got as the so-called ‘payback’. Todoroki picked himself up from the floor and took a step backwards, adjusting his position to account for the new location of the sofa. However, just as he was about to sit down for the second time, the front side of the lower cushions and the wood frame of the sofa came crashing against the back of his legs and knees, tripping him up in the process. This time, Todoroki fell forward on all fours, his well-trained arms easily taking the impact without any strain or injury. Once again, Todoroki glanced up at Bakugou, twice as confused. “...???”

“That’s so you won’t do that or similar stuff ever again,” declared Bakugou without a single drop of mercy. Satisfied with the

flabbergasted reaction he had gotten out of Todoroki, he leisurely walked back around the sofa and took a seat there without a care in the world.

…I don't know if I should laugh at this or just take it without saying a single word, Todoroki mumbled to his own buttons as he got back up yet again and cleaned his hands of any dirt it had gathered from the floor. Within Bakugou's standards, these kinds of petty acts were pretty light and childish. He wouldn't go as far as to call them 'half-hearted', since Bakugou had meant them, but they were nothing compared to the other torturous acts he had inflicted on their classmates during their dorm days.

Bakugou had a pouty frown on his face as he remained seated on the sofa, arms still crossed over his chest. Perhaps suspecting such might be a bit of a stretch, but could it be that rather than being angry at Todoroki for the little chair incident, Bakugou was feeling embarrassed that it had happened while in front of so many people?

"That was my bad," Todoroki said wholeheartedly after he took a seat next to Bakugou, just like he usually did whenever he paid a late-night visit to his apartment. Apologising earnestly might be the best way to deal with this situation and his moody 'husband'. He wasn't very good with words, and Bakugou could smell BS a mile away, so he tried to keep things simple. "I should have been a bit more careful. But instead, I got too carried away, and that ended up happening. I'm sorry. You didn't get hurt anywhere, right?"

"…You think I'm so weak I'd get injured from falling from a freaking chair?" grumbled Bakugou, sideways glancing at Todoroki with a fuming glare. He truly could be the personification of 'if looks could kill' when needed…

"That's not what I meant," deadpanned Todoroki, his way to suppress the eyeroll he wanted to give to that response. Why couldn't Bakugou just obediently accept an apology instead of turning it into a match of

some sort? “I’ve taken responsibility for my actions and paid the price for what I did. Can’t we say we’re even now?”

“That’s not up to you to decide,” scoffed Bakugou, turning his head in the opposite direction. He used that as a way to take a peek at the security camera's feed on the monitors to see how the mass exodus was going. The conference room still seemed as packed as before. Those professional stalkers really were taking their sweet time leaving in hopes of seeing the ‘couple of the day’ one more time, weren’t they?

“Then who gets to decide it?” asked Todoroki, a bit disappointed that Bakugou had looked away. But he wasn’t one to wallow on such things for very long. He was more of the type that went and got what he wanted. Todoroki slid his body on the sofa and scooched closer to Bakugou, until their legs were neatly pressed against each other. He then leaned his upper body sideways until he could see Bakugou’s face once again. Sure enough, he still had that sulking frown on him. “You?”

“Isn’t that more than obvious?” grumbled Bakugou, his mood getting even more cranky. Todoroki was always so annoyingly relentless with the weirdest things. This was turning out to be one of them. He was about to uncross his arms and swat that pesky expressionless face away from him when that very same pesky expressionless face suddenly came closer. So close that the air keeping them apart momentarily disappeared throughout the light peck that was delivered to his lips. Bakugou might not have made it in time to slap his hand on Todoroki’s face, but he sure did when it came to pinching both of his cheeks simultaneously. “So this is how you want to die, huh? I told you I’m not gonna get manipulated by a dumb mutt who keeps using the same trick, didn’t I?”

We’re back to the day 2 pattern, it seems… That’s a bit of a bummer, sighed Todoroki in the back of his mind, keeping himself completely still despite his cheeks currently being stretched to their fleshy limit. This regression in Bakugou’s reactions was not what he had been hoping for day 4. He wanted the progress to be a linear crescendo, not

a zigzag that went back and forth depending on the circumstances. Something needed to be done to fix this and fast!

But what could Todoroki do to help his cause? What did couples usually do when facing this type of situation? What would get a positive reaction out of Bakugou that surpassed day 3's? Todoroki had to come up with something as soon as possible, or else Bakugou would get tired of pinching his cheeks and move on with his pouting for the rest of the day.

Wait, what if the problem is something much simpler? Todoroki halted and thought back on what Bakugou had just told him. He said he wasn't going to be manipulated by someone who kept using the same trick, right? Todoroki also remembered him saying something similar on day 1. Could it be that the problem here was pretty much just a lack of variety? *Thinking back on it, all I've been doing so far is kiss him out of the blue. But couples who have been together for three years, let alone those who are married, aren't limited to just kisses, right? Now I see. No wonder Bakugou isn't having the kind of reaction I was hoping to get. I'm not being a good husband. I should fix that now, before we regress even further.*

"Showwy, Ha'uhou," said Todoroki, placing his hands on top of Bakugou's hands - which, by the way, were still relentlessly pinching Todoroki's cheeks and making his words come out worse than a drunkard's slurring. His actions were so sudden that they even caught Bakugou by surprise, whose body flinched for less than a fraction of a second. He used his hands to pry Bakugou's fingers away from his reddish cheeks, grabbing them as they were lowered. "I've seen the error in my ways. That won't happen again, I swear."

"Hmph. If you've learned your lesson, then you'd better act on it properly from now on," scoffed Bakugou, a bit confused but nevertheless satisfied that his little punishment had finally put some sense into this idiot's brain. Or so he thought. What came next made him question more things than he felt comfortable with. Like, for example, how truly dense can a human being be?

“I’m on it,” acknowledged Todoroki with an extremely serious nod of his head. He didn’t think he’d get permission this soon, but he was more than willing to work on it according to Bakugou’s pace.

He carefully placed Bakugou’s hands on top of his lap and then straightened his upper body back to a proper sitting position. Todoroki did not want to repeat his earlier mistake of placing too much weight on something or someone while at an awkward angle. That’s why he turned his body towards Bakugou, until he was pretty much sitting on the edge of the sofa, before he leaned in closer again. For additional support, he placed his hand on the sofa’s armrest. At first, he thought just that would do the trick, but the closer he got to Bakugou, the more he questioned the structural integrity of his position. In the end, rather than staying seated, Todoroki decided to get up and then place his knee back down on the sofa, in between Bakugou’s legs.

While all of that was unfolding, Bakugou simply silently stared at Todoroki like he had just grown a second head right before his eyes.

“What the heck are you doing…?” asked Bakugou, absolutely baffled about whatever that was supposed to be. He didn’t even know what name to give it since, c’mon now, what do you even call suddenly being cornered like that while sitting on a sofa? Sofa-don? To make his confusion worse, he also had no idea how they even ended up in such a position in the first place.

“Hm? I’m doing it properly, like you told me to,” explained Todoroki without really explaining anything. Not that he would be able to even if he wanted to. He wasn’t exactly the most talkative or eloquent person out there. A picture was worth a thousand words, but since he didn’t have any at hand, a physical demonstration would have to suffice.

“What is that even supposed to mean?” was what Bakugou was about to say to that unclear jumble of words, but before he could, he was already being kissed once again. This time, though, it wasn’t like the little peck from earlier; it was a proper kiss that had some weight and substance to it. He could feel Todoroki’s warm lips pressing against his, rather than just a ticklish tap. From there, the kiss evolved into a gentle nibble on his lower lip. Something about that made Bakugou close his eyes tightly on reflex.

How cute, Todoroki thought to himself as he got a small glimpse of Bakugou’s scrunched-up face. The hand on the sofa’s armrest turned out not to be as helpful as he initially thought, so he decided to allocate it elsewhere for the time being. He cupped Bakugou’s warm face, the pad of his thumb slowly sliding down his pursed lips as if saying, ‘let me in already.’ It took Todoroki a couple more kisses and nibbles to melt the stubbornness out of Bakugou, but the wait was still worth its weight in gold.

Just like during the press conference, Todoroki didn’t think twice about deepening their kiss the moment Bakugou gave him the tiniest of opportunities. With the hand cupping his face, he could even guide him into the optimal position to keep the kiss going as comfortably as possible. Not that he had much leeway to think about anything aside from the kiss. He was too busy enjoying the tongue-on-tongue contact to consider anything else, and Bakugou was most likely the same.

Only when the kiss started becoming a bit too oppressive for their lungs did they slow down a bit - and even that was done as if it was a huge sacrifice they were making. Todoroki unhurriedly pulled their lips apart, despite keeping their faces close enough that they could feel each other’s gasping breaths tickling their skin. When his thumb once again caressed Bakugou’s lips, this time they were moist and slick with their saliva. The sight of them in such an erotic state, while framed right below Bakugou’s unyielding eyes, did things to his body that he was probably better off not dwelling on too much.

Yeah, this is much more suitable for day 4, concluded Todoroki in the back of his mind, extremely pleased with the flushed expression he

was seeing on Bakugou's face. He could have ended it there and called it a day. Maybe he should have done exactly that. But they hadn't created any rule that said they could only do this once a day. They were also on holiday right now. They had all the time in the world to indulge themselves.

Besides, Todoroki had just told himself he would do better from now on, but, in the end, all he had done so far was kiss. He needed to break that unconscious cycle if he wanted to see any actual progress in their mission.

With that in mind and no complaints whatsoever from Bakugou, Todoroki went after those delicious lips one more time. Since they had kissed so many times by now, with most of those kisses having happened in these last couple of minutes, Todoroki figured he should be about to reach that point where he could claim to be used to kissing Bakugou. However, strangely enough, he still felt as giddy about the n-th kiss as he had on the first. The act itself was becoming familiar to him, but his reaction to it remained the same. No, if anything, it was augmented each time it happened, especially the more kisses in a row there were. Thanks to that, he now had this even stronger and more desperate urge to kiss Bakugou. It was a miscalculation that he truly had not seen coming.

"Bakugou…" Todoroki whispered during a little break, a small respite to gather the needed oxygen to do it all over again. He lowered his body some more while leaning his chest closer to Bakugou, which made it no longer needed to keep his face cupped. His hand fell from Bakugou's rosy cheeks and promptly nestled itself on the small of his back, crammed in the little space there was still between Bakugou and the sofa's backrest.

The heat radiating from Bakugou's body was starting to feel so tempting, doubly so with him already being tightly held in his arms. He was directly touching the hotness of his lips, mouth and tongue, but that didn't mean that the rest of him would share the same temperature… right? Now that Todoroki had that question stuck inside his brain, he couldn't help but feel hyperaware of the thin layer

of fabric between them. It was summer, so neither of them was overdressed or wearing several pieces of clothing on top of each other. All it took was a little slip of his hand, and Todoroki would find out how hot Bakugou's body truly was.

The payoff of his lack of self-restraint was as phenomenal as one would expect. The moment his fingers overcame the hem of Bakugou's t-shirt and touched his smooth skin, they were unable to stop. His hand kept moving up Bakugou's velvety back, now and then travelling over a scar or two. Todoroki could feel every muscle contracting, every bone moving as he climbed higher alongside his arched spine.

As for Bakugou… Well, what was there even left to say when your brain is still stuck on trying to figure out how the heck they had gotten to this point? That's exactly where he was at. With his brain so busy thinking about the senseless, he had no time to spare on his body. After all, this was just a part of their mission. The better they were at pretending to be a couple, the easier their mission would be… supposedly. And they were legally married to one another… on paper. A kiss or two wouldn't be an issue. A touch here and there was all within reasonable expectations. As for the rest… The rest was the rest. Just some little details that didn't matter much in the grand scheme of things.

Besides, none of this necessarily felt that bad. Had Bakugou been unwilling or uncomfortable with any of it, he wouldn't have given Todoroki a chance to do it ever again, mission or not. But kissing him was… okay. If he went about it in greater detail, he could even say it was pretty darn great. And the more they did it, the better it felt. That made total sense in his mind, as the more you did something, the better you got at it. So, of course kissing Todoroki already felt so good that his body was turning into putty as we speak.

He wasn't a big fan of other people being all over his body or of that annoying skinship that his friends kept badgering him with, but it would be plain unreasonable to enforce that on Todoroki, given the circumstances. Couples were known for being all touchy-feely regardless of time, place or occasion, right? So, again, it was a part of

their mission. And they were married. And he didn't necessarily hate it. That made being touched by Todoroki and vice versa… fine. To sum it up in an accurate way, he would describe it as really soothing, but in a way that made his body fidget and squirm all over. He remembered once reading about how feeling somebody else's body heat could have a calming effect, and sure enough, that matched his experience with Todoroki. With how stressful his daily life was, him having a soft spot for Todoroki's gentle touch and caresses due to the body heat being transmitted through his hands wasn't that outlandish.

"Ngh… Don't stop now…" Bakugou mumbled when Todoroki pulled back yet again. Part of him knew it was just one more of the little breaks between voracious kisses, but none of that made much sense to him, so why would his words be any different? He slipped two fingers into the collar of Todoroki's t-shirt, took a good hold of it and then yanked him back to the same spot as before, his mouth all ready to pick up where they had left off.

Just like it had happened the first time Bakugou had kissed him, Todoroki's body froze instantly. But unlike that time, it only lasted for half a second or less. He thought they had already been going pretty heavy with the kissing, compared to previous times, but there was just something about this last kiss that sort of made him lose it completely. Bakugou might have just pushed one of his buttons by accident, for all he knew. The only thing that was clear to him right now was that his mouth wasn't going anywhere else anytime soon.

Todoroki already had one of his arms coiled around Bakugou's back, his feverish skin rubbing against the warmth he was clinging to, but no close was ever close enough. Due to how he was leaning over Bakugou, one of his knees pressed against the sofa, there would always be a gap between them. No matter what he did, there was no changing that. It felt awfully frustrating, like something or someone was conspiring against them, even though Todoroki had been the one deciding everything, his 'attack position' included.

To compensate for yet another miscalculation, he was relentless with his kisses. They had been at it for so long, their lips and the

surrounding area had become quite the sloppy mess. Little trickles of saliva overflowed from the corner of Bakugou's lips, which Todoroki would now and then lick clean right before he slipped his tongue right in. Each gasp for air came out desperate, but they still got drowned out by the wet, lewd sounds.

They were going all out with the making out, but even that soon became too lacking. Bakugou would, on occasion, tug at the collar of Todoroki's t-shirt with his fingers, as if he was telling him to come just a little bit closer, but there wasn't much Todoroki could do that didn't end up with him squashing Bakugou against the sofa's backrest or them falling off from their little corner on the sofa. Death was the only thing that awaited him if the second scenario was the one they accidentally landed on…

On the other hand, who was he to say no to Bakugou? Todoroki leaned on him as much as he could, despite the awkward space between their upper bodies. Just like he had predicted, that got Bakugou tightly pressed against the backrest, leaving him with little to no room to move. He heard no complaints from him; only gasps, sighs, and muffled whimpers left his red, soft lips.

I had no idea he could be this docile, chuckled Todoroki in the back of his mind. No, 'docile' wasn't the right word to describe him. It was more like downright 'weak to pleasure'. A single caress on his back with his fingertip had Bakugou quivering from head to toe, his jaw tensing despite refusing to interrupt their kisses. Such alluring reactions were beyond criminal when coming from someone who was worldwide known for being a demonic menace akin to an indestructible one-man army. Having those sorts of thoughts crossing through his mind only made Todoroki hungrier for more, which was as dangerous a double-edged sword as one would expect. *Crap, at this rate, I'll-*

"ARE YOU HAPPY NOW, SHOUTO!?" Out of nowhere, a booming voice barged into the room, together with the crashing sound of a door being slammed open. Enji had a furious expression on his face, the flames erupting from him sputtering around in a wild, rebellious

show. He opened his mouth wide to continue admonishing his son, but nothing but a dying gasp came out of it when his gaze finally reached the sofa. “Ah……”

“Yup, I’d say he looks pretty happy, yeah,” said Burnin with a mischievous smirk on her face, being the only person currently inside that room who hadn’t turned into stone. Endeavor was frozen in place mid-admonishment. Onima and Kidou, who had been trying to keep their boss under control, were also standing by the door, absolutely flabbergasted and slightly embarrassed. And, of course, the two who had been caught red-handed getting frisky on that sofa also went pretty quiet due to the unexpected interruption.

Calling this situation awkward would probably be the understatement of the year - or so would the majority involved in this incident agree on.

Be that as it may, you could always count on a certain icy-hot idiot being too dense to read the room in an appropriate manner, for better or for worse.

“You’re already this old and you still don’t know how to knock first?” Todoroki snapped back once he let out a quick, disappointed sigh, the direction of his gaze hinting at who exactly those words were meant for.

“Wha-!?” yelped Enji, that needless attack startling him out of his shock. “Why should I have to knock while at *my* hero agency!? Plus, this is a common area available to every staff member, a place where there’s zero expectations for… for… *that* !”

“How about all of us take a 5-minute break outside, and then we give this another chance?” suggested Onima, already in the process of pushing his boss’s humongous body out of the room.

“See? I told you neither Shouto nor Dynamight are the type to lie about their relationships,” sighed Kidou, also helping his coworker with the pushing. “It’s clear they are telling the truth about being married, so just give that whole ‘they are faking it’ story a rest already.”

“That’s exactly what they want you to think…!!!” roared Enji, kicking up a fuss on his way back outside. “But I won’t be fooled! I refuse to be fooled!”

Enji was still loudly contesting and arguing as Burnin gave them a quick thumbs-up and then closed the door behind herself.

“I can’t believe he’s still acting like this despite everything that has happened so far…” sighed Todoroki, his shoulders dropping just the slightest. This was exactly why he needed such an elaborate plan to be able to escape those messed-up family traditions. As expected, his father was the challenging opponent that Todoroki knew he would be. “We might have to… Ah.”

The moment Todoroki looked back at Bakugou, he immediately knew he was done for.

“Ah? Ah, you say…!?” hissed Bakugou, his erotic expression long pushed aside and replaced with a demonic scowl. He added a second hand to the one already holding onto Todoroki’s t-shirt and started shaking him back and forth. “What the heck were you thinking, doing something like that at a place like this!? Are you that dumb!? No, don’t you dare answer! I already know you are that dumb! But being a horny dumbass doesn’t mean you can do whatever the hell you please, whenever the hell you want, wherever the hell you are!”

“You were the one who told me not to stop,” pointed out Todoroki, allowing himself to be shaken around like a rag doll in hopes of quelling some of Bakugou’s anger.

“No, I did not!” denied Bakugou, his scowl getting even more creased, but also redder from embarrassment. That denial was meant as an attack against Todoroki’s truthful words just as much as it was being used in retaliation for his own memories. “I would never do something so stupid in a place like this! Stop trying to shift the blame to me, you perv! You were the one who decided to jump me right after telling me you’d do better from now on! So not only are you a horny dumbass, but you’re also a liar!”

“I didn’t lie. I meant it when I said I’d do better from now on,” sighed Todoroki, a bit relieved that the shaking had finally stopped. He used this chance to adjust himself and his clothes, and then sat down on the sofa in a more appropriate fashion. “Which is exactly why I gave it my best while kissing you. Besides, you literally gave me your okay before I did it. And before you start denying that too, just take into account that we have now successfully convinced Burnin, Onima and Kidou thanks to what just happened. Having them on our side will make the battle against my father much easier.”

“Tsk…” Unable to say anything back at that, Bakugou simply clicked his tongue in annoyance and crossed his arms over his chest in preparation to sulk some more all over again.

It’s pretty vexing that we got interrupted like this by my father, but…, Todoroki muttered inwardly, unable to resist the urge to reach out to Bakugou and use the back of his fingers to wipe the wet smudge on the corner of his lips. Bakugou obviously declined his help, angrily rubbed his mouth clean with the back of his hand and then slightly turned his back on him.

The reddish tint dyeing the tips of Bakugou’s ears was still perfectly visible, though, and it got Todoroki’s heart jumping around inside his

chest as fast as when he was kissing him.

Maybe it's for the best that we got interrupted. I have no idea how I would have stopped otherwise…

Chapter 14

Not so surprisingly, Todoroki and Bakugou found themselves in yet another tense setting, this one caused solemnly by the glaring eyes of a certain overbearing parent.

The emergency 5-minute break was over, and the previous group was all crammed inside the support room connected to the conference room. Given what had just happened, the ‘married couple’ was freely occupying the entire sofa, this time with a healthy amount of space between themselves, while Enji and his sidekicks were relegated to the chairs they had pulled from the nearby desk or simply standing behind their boss.

“You two are unbelievable… To think you’d go to such lengths to keep this dumb lie going…” grumbled Enji, his ice blue gaze tightening as he closely observed the pair sitting in front of him. Burnin loudly cleared her throat and nudged her elbow on his torso in an obvious attempt at warning him. Enji just mumbled something inaudible under his breath and then let out an extremely loud sigh. “The people you invited for the press conference have all left our premises, but a bunch of them are now circling the building and, a bit further away, the entire block.”

“In other words, we’re surrounded,” cheerfully added Burnin, a knowing smirk already present on her lips. “And that’s not all. Our reception area keeps getting call after call with questions about you two. We even had to get some additional staff in our customer service division. I imagine the hero agencies you usually partner up with are going through the same thing, Dynamight.”

“Yeah, I bet,” scoffed Bakugou, not surprised at all at hearing such news. Everything that was happening was exactly the kind of positive scandal he had been looking for, and, as such, all of this was within his expectations. During Todoroki’s sudden visits to his apartment, they had discussed at length about what would come after they

publicly announced their marriage and how they would use it in their favour. While plenty that was outside of their control could unfold at any given moment, they had still done their due diligence to minimise any type of repercussions or accidents. “I made sure to email every single one of them earlier this morning so they wouldn’t be caught off guard by our press conference. I’m sure they know what to do from here onwards until I’m back from our honeymoon.”

“Honeymoon, my ass…” grumbled Enji under his breath, that word alone making his eyebrow twitch relentlessly. He was yet again hit by Burnin’s elbow as a result.

“We knew this would happen, so we’ll deal with the reporters and journalists outside,” said Todoroki after shooting his father with yet another expressionless glare. “I don’t want my private life to interfere with everyone’s work here at the agency.”

“Nah, we’re more than used to having to deal with the aftermath of the Todoroki family getting exposed for this or that,” reassured Burnin, waving her hand around in a dismissive manner. Both Onima and Kidou nodded along with her, for better or for worse. “At the very least, this time it’s for the right reasons. Right, Boss?”

“What ‘right reasons’!? They are lying to everyone’s faces!” Enji roared, letting Burnin’s pointed comment pass by without saying much about it - after all, it was the truth and, for the most part, his fault too. Even though another elbow jab came his way, this time he didn’t let it quiet him down instantly. “I don’t understand why all of you are letting them deceive you this blatantly! Don’t you find it weird how they are all ‘we’ve been secretly dating this whole time and now we’re married’ right after I told Shouto to pick a bride from the folder I so painstakingly created with his bright future in mind!? This is obviously just an elaborate scheme to avoid going through with that arranged marriage, which, by the way, has been a part of our family traditions for literal centuries!”

“So you say, but they seem pretty legit, if you ask me,” pointed out Onima, grabbing the copy of the marriage certificate that Todoroki had placed on display all over again. “No matter how you look at it, this is a real marriage certificate. They are married, Boss.”

“You keep saying, ‘it’s a lie, it’s a lie’ and that we’re scheming behind everyone’s backs like you’re a broken record, but what makes you even think I’d go along with such a bullshit plan in the first place?” groaned Bakugou with an annoyed roll of his eyes. “What’s in it for me to pretend to be dating him, let alone get married for real?”

“W-Well, that’s…” mumbled Enji, unable to come up with a good explanation against those counter-arguments Bakugou had just pulled out of thin air.

As expected of Bakugou. He really is good when it comes to denying the truth, deadpanned Todoroki in the back of his mind, simply throwing a quick glance at his ‘husband’ before he returned all of his attention to his father. Even though he didn’t expect Enji to give up any time soon, he could already see some cracks forming. They were very close to a meaningful breakthrough, what with everyone around them welcoming the news and accepting the newlywed couple. Maybe with just one last push, they would be able to temporarily stave off Enji while they dealt with the current journalistic stalking.

“I don’t know why you’re being so stubborn with all of this, but if it’s more proof that you need, I can give it to you,” sighed Todoroki, feeling slightly tired at just the thought of having this conversation all over again. Seeing Bakugou fidget a bit at his words, perhaps thinking he was going to kiss him again, made him feel a bit better and restored his good mood somewhat, but, sadly, that was not what he was about to do. He placed his hand in his pants’ pocket and grabbed his smartphone. Todoroki briefly browsed his contact list, pressed a specific entry and then put the ongoing call on speaker. “Hello, Mom.”

“Oh, good morning, Shouto,” said Rei with a bright, cheerful voice. *“I*

just saw your press conference. I'm so happy you two have finally made your relationship public. Congratulations on receiving such a warm reception from everyone you invited there today."

"Thanks," deadpanned Todoroki, his expressionless eyes staring straight into his father's as his mother's warm words spread throughout the entire room. He had let Rei know in advance that he might need to call her after the press conference for this exact reason, so they had agreed on a quick dialogue between them that helped solidify his fake relationship with Bakugou. "I'm also glad everyone is being so understanding and welcoming. Well, *almost* everyone…"

"It's a big surprise and change to some people, but I'm sure everyone will give you two their blessings once the shock has faded away," chuckled Rei. *"I know you two have a pretty packed schedule ahead of you, what with you moving in together, but let me know if you're able to come over for a quick visit. I have yet to give you two my wedding gift."*

"Sure, I'll talk with Bakugou about that and then let you know when we're coming by," acknowledged Todoroki, his fixed stare momentarily faltering back to Bakugou. This sudden invitation from his mother was quite the gamble, given that Bakugou was so insistent on keeping their families separate. But given the current circumstances, Bakugou couldn't exactly turn her down on the spot. That suited Todoroki just fine. Bakugou wasn't one to go back on his word, so if he said 'yes' right now, he would follow through with it no matter how much he'd like to do otherwise. Todoroki turned a bit more towards Bakugou and tilted his head to a very soft angle. "Do you not want to go?"

This damn bastard…! Bakugou cursed in the back of his mind, fighting hard not to crease his whole face into a frightening scowl. Todoroki was keeping the same deadpan expression he always had, but Bakugou could tell that he knew very well what he was doing. He would bet his entire savings that Todoroki was doing it in retaliation for all the 'no's he had given him so far whenever it came to their families. The worst part was that if he relented and said 'yes' this one time, Todoroki would definitely use it against him later on, under the

guise of keeping things fair in both directions. However, despite knowing this, turning him down now would jeopardise their entire mission. That was the last thing Bakugou wanted to happen during such an early stage. “.....I’ll go. Maybe… If we have the time…”

“Okay,” said Todoroki, his expressionless demeanour lighting up just the slightest. Most wouldn’t notice it unless they were paying really close attention or if they knew the minute differences in the short range of facial expressions that Todoroki had. “You heard him, right, Mom?”

“Yes. Yes, I did,” Rei chuckled once again, as she was capable of spotting the happiness hidden within her son’s voice. *“If possible, come by the end of the day or during the weekend. That way, Fuyumi will be around too. She’s also very excited to congratulate you two in person. Oh, speaking of which. We have a few more recipes that I’m sure you’d love to try out yourself, Bakugou-kun.”*

“Got it,” Bakugou briefly acknowledged, shooting a quick sideways glare at his ‘husband’. Why the hell was cooking always weaponised against him like this by the Todoroki family? Did they really think he was incapable of finding new recipes on his own? Bakugou made sure to store this little nitpick away in the back burner for when it was just the two of them. He was going to make it crystal clear to Todoroki what happened when he played around with fire in such a ridiculous way!

“I need to go now. We’re about to leave the hero agency and go sign the paperwork for our new home,” declared Todoroki, a bit bummed out that this was the extent of their conversation. He wanted Bakugou to speak with his mother a bit more, in hopes of changing his mind about his strict family rules. However, a victory was a victory. He could take his time bridging the gap between both sets of families now that they were legally connected through their marriage. “I’ll let you know how it goes later.”

“Good luck with it. I hope everything goes well,” said Rei as her parting words. After a quick bye, Todoroki pressed the red button on his smartphone’s touchscreen and ended the call.

“Is this good enough for you, or are you still going to insist we’re lying?” asked Todoroki, once again turning towards his father. He could see him gritting his teeth in pure exasperation, unable to deny the fact that his wife seemed to be fairly accustomed to the fact that their youngest son was in a romantic relationship with Bakugou.

“Grrr… I… I’m still not convinced!!!” roared Enji, getting up from his seat without any warning. He pointed his index finger at the ‘couple’ sitting on the sofa, the flames around his face once again dancing wildly from the intense emotions he was going through. “My gut is telling me there’s something else going on here. Your so-called relationship is too sudden and convenient for my liking. I will do my utmost to find out what exactly you two are scheming together!”

“Ugh, you’re so damn stubborn!” groaned Bakugou, loudly exhaling a long sigh as he crossed his arms over his chest. “Just what exactly do we have to do to make you believe us, huh? Why don’t you give us an example or two of your ‘relationship requirements’? Because I’m pretty sure we can clear them easy-peasy!”

“Fine! If you truly have been together for three whole years, why was I the only one kept in the dark about it?” asked Enji, taking that defiant youngster up on his offer. “Rei seems to know about you two, I’ll give you that, but you have also been claiming that your friends have been aware of this since the start, right? Well, why don’t you go ahead and prove it?”

“Alright,” said Bakugou with a dismissive shrug. He didn’t even think twice about grabbing his smartphone and opening his contact list. He then motioned the device towards Enji. “Pick whoever you want.”

“Grrr…” Enji tightened his gaze and closely observed Bakugou’s smartphone, almost as if he was discerning whether that was a trap or not. Burnin’s comment of ‘Ohh, this is about to get good’ was all the motivation he needed to snatch the phone from Bakugou’s hand and go through the contact list in search of the perfect witness. He wasn’t sure how close Bakugou was to their former classmates, but he was certain they would come to his defence if they were pressed for an answer. If nothing, the former class A was loyal to one another. That made the boys a bad target by default. If there were someone whom he could intimidate through his voice only, it would have to be one of the girls. Fortunately, Bakugou seemed to have the phone number of at least one of them, so that was the contact that he selected. “Let’s see if you’re really telling the truth or not!”

Heh, you just gave us a victory on a silver platter, snickered Bakugou in the back of his mind when he saw the name of the person Enji had picked. Honestly, he couldn’t have asked for a better outcome if he tried.

“Hello?” came Uraraka’s voice after a couple of rings on speaker mode. *“It’s pretty rare for you to call, Bakugou-kun? Is something the matter?”*

“This is Endeavor speaking,” interrupted Enji, not giving either Bakugou or Todoroki the chance to intervene or warn Uraraka about what was going on. This was a serious test they needed to pass without any cheating involved. “I’m borrowing Bakugou’s phone for a while.”

“Eh? Is Bakugou-kun okay?” worriedly asked Uraraka, clearly confused about what exactly was going on. That was just perfect, Enji thought to himself, a victorious smirk already tugging at the corner of his lips. *“Didn’t he and Todoroki-kun just finish their press conference?”*

“They’re fine. I’m just… ascertaining some details about their relationship,” scoffed Enji, already counting the minutes to the tragic end of his son’s doomed plan to escape an arranged marriage.

“Oh, that’s a relief to hear,” Uraraka sighed, her voice less shaky and uncertain. *“It would be terrible if something bad were to happen just a few days after they got married. They have been looking forward to it for the longest time now, so I want them to enjoy their honeymoon period in peace and quiet. They’ve done so much for us and our country; they deserve to have the best marriage the world can offer, at the very least. I’m sure you must also be very happy for them, Endeavor-san. After all, Todoroki-kun is at his best when he’s with Bakugou-kun!”*

“.....What?” Enji somehow managed to blurt out that sole word, his jaw on the verge of slacking wide open had he not caught himself on time. Surely there must have been some sort of misunderstanding, or maybe that smartphone was being hacked by someone on their side… because this conversation seemed to be confirming everything that Todoroki and Bakugou had told him so far…

“D-Did I say something wrong?” asked Uraraka, sounding quite confused about Enji’s flabbergasted scepticism.

“No… You didn’t…” grumbled Enji, ending the phone call in a rush once he saw the mischievous smirk on Bakugou’s face. He didn’t even need to open his mouth to hit Enji with an ‘I told you so’.

“Just for the record, we never told you about us because we all knew you would do exactly what you are doing right now,” added Todoroki with the intention of dealing the finishing blow. “We were already pretty busy back then while kickstarting our official pro hero careers. The last thing we needed was to also deal with your childish power plays and unreasonable demands. That’s why everyone agreed to keep it a secret from you until it was time to announce our relationship publicly.”

“You'd better be glad we talked with you first rather than let you find out together with the rest of the world,” snickered Bakugou, twisting

the knife that his ‘husband’ had so masterfully stabbed into his own father.

That last sentence was an instant KO - Todoroki Enji had undoubtedly lost.

For now.

Chapter 15

“Ugh, we’re finally done with that…” grumbled Bakugou, feeling so very glad to be out of that room at long last. After he and Todoroki tag-teamed Enji and crushed his fighting spirit, the impromptu meeting ended fairly fast and without further disturbances. “Now we just need to find a way out that doesn’t drive me insane on day 1 of my time off…”

“Yeah… This is worse than I thought it would be,” deadpanned Todoroki, his heterochromatic eyes staring fixedly at the outside of the glass front doors and walls of the humongous building hosting Endeavor’s hero agency. Never mind the manicured cityscape, or the sporadic cars and buses passing by, the only thing visible was an endless horde of people - far more people than Todoroki ever thought possible in a single sidewalk. He tilted his head just the slightest. “Maybe we went a bit too far?”

“Ya think!?” hissed Bakugou, throwing a dirty glare at his ‘husband’ and the culprit in question. “What were you even expecting to happen after you kissed me like that and literally made me fall from that freakin’ chair, huh!?”

“Well… Not this…” Todoroki admitted earnestly, looking a bit embarrassed and perhaps even regretful as Bakugou’s crimson eyes angrily persecuted him alongside his words. “I figured some of them would just, you know, go interview people we know and the like.”

“Yeah, I bet some of them did. But I also bet that everyone who wasn’t here in person has come rushing in hopes of still getting some good scoops midway through our scandal!” pointed out Bakugou, doing his best to keep his venomous voice just between the two of them. They already had plenty of eyes on them as they stood in the lobby area of the hero agency; they didn’t need ears added to the mix, either. “When Burnin’ said we were surrounded, I thought she was just exaggerating or teasing us. But nope, we are surrounded in every

single sense of that word! BECAUSE OF YOU!”

“I already said I’m sorry…” sighed Todoroki, his shoulders dropping despondently some more. “I really didn’t think our ‘last resort’ manoeuvre would be this effective… Not after the bland response we got from my father or his sidekicks…”

“Of course a calm, mindful reaction would look bland in your dense eyes…” Bakugou groaned in pure exasperation. Enji aside, he was sure they got a ‘bland response’ from Burnin’ and company because they were so well acquainted with both Todoroki and Bakugou. Plus, Todoroki was to become their boss in the future. Freaking out in a very apparent way would not only be extremely rude, but it could also damage their professional relationship and reputation. Not that Bakugou thought they’d go crazy with the reactions. They dealt with pro hero Endeavor and all the skeletons he kept in the closet for several years; seeing a kiss or two was nothing in comparison. “But never mind that now! We need to find a way out of here that doesn’t get us instantly swarmed by those vultures!”

“Since we’re surrounded, they must also be keeping guard on the employee’s only entrance we used earlier,” pointed out Todoroki, doing exactly as requested and putting that portion of the conversation aside for the time being. “Maybe we could call a taxi directly here? We have security guarding the gate to that entrance. They’d let the taxi in but keep the journalists and reporters out.”

“Nah, taxi drivers aren’t used to this sort of situation,” said Bakugou, crossing his arms over his chest as he tried to figure out which one of his ‘escape plans’ could be safely deployed to solve this unexpected crisis. “We could very well end up with a driver that cracks under pressure and runs out of the car the moment those vultures surround the vehicle. Using sidekicks and staff to cordon off the road for long enough for us to get the hell out of here could work, but they also have better things to do than to babysit and keep those desperate morons under control.”

“I don’t think they’d be that opposed to giving us a hand with this, too, but yeah, I get what you mean,” agreed Todoroki while nodding his head along. They had disrupted the daily schedule of the entire hero agency plenty with the press conference; he couldn’t bother them any more than he already did. “That only leaves us with one option: using our Quirks to leave through the rooftop.”

“Hell no! We’re definitely not doing that!” Bakugou rejected Todoroki’s suggestion nearly instantly, his face creased with a moody frown. “If we had our hero costumes with us, it would be one thing. But with our civilian clothes on? Yeah, no, thanks! I’m saving that for a true emergency.”

“Oh…” Todoroki was a bit saddened by having his plan shot down this fast, but he also could see why Bakugou did so. Just because they were licensed pro heroes didn’t mean they could abuse the privilege of being allowed to use their Quirks while out in public. Plus, their hero costumes were designed to lessen any kickbacks their Quirks may cause - that applied especially to the two of them, as Bakugou needed those arm braces to not injure himself with his explosions, and Todoroki required some help keeping his body temperature not too cold and not too hot.

As for the ‘true emergency’ Bakugou was alluding to… that was obviously about the villain group that wanted to recruit him. Now that their marriage was publicly revealed, it was only a matter of time for them to make their move - whether that meant contacting Bakugou directly, going after Todoroki to eliminate him, or causing a big commotion to disturb their ‘honeymoon vacation’. They needed to be on their guard and in top shape at all times in anticipation of any eventual incidents and attacks.

“Then what should we do?” asked Todoroki, glancing back and forth between Bakugou and the crowd gathered outside the building.

“That’s what I’m trying to figure out,” grumbled Bakugou with a

sullen hmph. “If you stop bothering me while I’m thinking, I’ll come up with something way faster.”

How am I supposed to know you want to think in silence if you keep talking with me without ever mentioning that?, Todoroki deadpanned in the back of his mind. He once again went along with Bakugou’s demands and shut up. Since they had discarded so many plans already, he, too, decided to think up a different solution. *Maybe we could create some sort of diversion and use that chance to slip past-*

“Great! You two are still here.” Burnin’s voice came from behind them out of the blue, much to their surprise. Since she had taken heartbroken Enji back to his office on the upper floors, they figured they wouldn’t see her anymore for the rest of the week. However, it seemed she had come back to the lobby area with them in mind specifically. “Here ya go! You can borrow it until you’re back from your honeymoon.”

“Oh.” Just as Todoroki was turning around to face Burnin, she threw something towards him. He caught it flawlessly with just one of his hands, eliciting the sound of metal bumping against metal. When Todoroki looked at what was now resting on the palm of his hand, he saw a car key connected with a small, metal keychain. He promptly recognised it as the car keys to one of the many vehicles the hero agency kept in the basement level garage, meant to be used by staff members, sidekicks and pro heroes while they were out and about in official business. “Are you sure we can take it for something that isn’t work…?”

“Yeah, go right ahead. We have plenty of them in ‘stock’. One less for just a week won’t do us any harm,” reassured Burnin while waving her hand dismissively. She winked at them and placed her index finger to her lips. “But try to keep it a secret from Endeavor, or he’ll kick up a fuss all over again.”

“Thanks. We’ll use it wisely,” said Todoroki, offering a small smile

filled with a quiet dose of gratitude. He glanced at Bakugou while jingling the car keys with his fingers. “I guess we now have a whole new solution to our current problem.”

“Perfect. Anyone who gets in our way is about to get run over,” snorted Bakugou, his lips curling into a mischievous smirk. Having their own vehicle indeed solved their current problem. It would also be very convenient to use as they went about their day, organising the moving process one step at a time. Just as he was about to snatch the key from Todoroki’s hand, it was raised higher in the air, out of his grasp.

“I think it’s safer if *I* drive,” deadpanned Todoroki, protectively clasping the car keys with his entire hand. He doubted that Bakugou would actually run over any gutsy journalist or paparazzi that placed themselves in front of or behind the car, but he was definitely crazy enough to drive in a very dubious manner just so they could lose anyone following them. Todoroki was a good enough driver, so he’d be able to perform such a duty as well as Bakugou would have, but without the road rage.

“Hmph! Suit yourself!” Although Bakugou was dissatisfied with that outcome, he really wanted to get a move on already. The press conference might have been shorter than he had accounted for, but they had wasted a whole lot more time with the aftermath than planned, all thanks to a certain stubborn old man. He glanced at his smartphone to check the time and then started walking towards the elevator. “Let’s get going then!”

“Okay,” said Todoroki, briefly offering a small nod as his farewell to Burnin. He easily caught up with Bakugou and stepped inside the elevator at the same time as him. The humming of the rectangular box being smoothly lowered to the underground garage was the only sound that could be heard for a good while, but once the door slid open to allow their exit, Todoroki started a new conversation. “Are we going to the realtor’s office first?”

“Obviously,” sighed Bakugou with a fed-up roll of his eyes. He had no idea which car the key belonged to, so he simply followed along next to Todoroki. “Once the rental contract is signed and paid for, and we get the house keys, we can start worrying about how the heck we’re going to do the moving while being followed by those stalkers.”

“Can we go to the realtor who owns our apartment complex, too?” asked Todoroki, unlocking the car from a distance to know where it was parked. When the flashing lights made its location known, they both walked towards it and got in without much care. Todoroki kept talking as he adjusted the driver’s seat and buckled the seat belt. “I don’t know about you, but I still need to break the lease on my current apartment. We don’t know how long our mission will take. It would be a waste of money to keep renting it while I’m living elsewhere. Though I have no idea how much I’ll have to pay to break the lease earlier than planned…”

“My rental contract is on a monthly basis. Sucks to suck, huh?” snorted Bakugou, snickering like a mischievous hyena at Todoroki’s poor planning. Then again, their mission was such a rushed ordeal that it probably would be impossible for Todoroki to follow through with the rental contract he had signed upon moving to that apartment, no matter how hard he tried. He quickly pressed a button on the dashboard, and all windows of the car darkened - a convenient perk of using company equipment was that it was adapted to be used in stealth mode, providing them with additional masking from those outside. “C’mon, let’s get a move on already.”

“Yeah, yeah,” sighed Todoroki, starting the car engine on command. The moment the car moved from its parking spot, they heard the automatic mechanism of the garage door echoing in the distance. The dim inside of the underground garage steadily filled with sunlight the closer they got to the open door. The tinted windows easily blocked most of the inside of the car from the outside, but to those inside, their surroundings were still as bright as they would have been with regular windows. *Huh, technology sure can be convenient. Maybe it would be okay to let Bakugou drive too at some point…*

The car smoothly drove up the ramp to the outside, the bright summer sun momentarily obfuscating their eyes. Once they hit the same side road they had walked on earlier that morning, the garage door cranked itself closed once again. From there, it took them a few seconds to reach the bar gate and the security guard keeping it safe. It was the very same sight they had observed earlier… except for the bustling crowd occupying the entirety of the sidewalk from either direction. Several vans were also sporadically parked along the road that connected with that side road. They were most likely the vehicles being used by the news crews and journalists surrounding Endeavor's hero agency and the entire neighbourhood.

When they saw the car stopping on the other side of the closed bar gate, the reporters and journalists closest to it started whispering with one another, cameras and cellphones ready to be used. However, they seemed indecisive about what to do, since they couldn't tell who was inside the car. As far as they were aware, that vehicle belonged to the hero agency. However, any staff member or sidekick could be currently using it to do their job. At most, they only knew for sure it couldn't be Endeavor, as he had his own well-known private chauffeur and car.

"Hah, look at all of these suckers," snorted Bakugou, pretty satisfied with the doubtful expressions on the reporters' faces. He placed his elbow on the door and then leaned the side of his face on the palm of his hand, taking in that sight with plenty of gusto. "They're like confused little ducklings, unsure whether they should follow this car or not. Now I kinda feel like rolling down the window and flicking them off as we drive away."

"Don't, that would be like pouring gasoline on a raging fire," sighed Todoroki, driving them out of there before Bakugou could begin taunting the journalists and reporters for real. "You'll have plenty of time to scream at them once we get back to our apartment complex. You said they'd be there waiting for me since they know where I live, right?"

"It's not like I know that for sure. No, actually, scratch that. I do know

it for sure. If anything, those professional stalkers are predictable as hell," grumbled Bakugou, carefully observing their surroundings. The further away from the hero agency they got, the fewer 'stalkers' he could spot amongst the regular citizens. Also satisfied with that, Bakugou then grabbed his smartphone from his pocket. "I'll give you the directions to the realtor's office."

"Yeah, please do," said Todoroki with a small nod of his head. Being a backseat driver might give Bakugou some control of the situation, which in turn will improve his mood even further. *Heh, I've lost count of how many times I've done precisely that in the past few days. Who would have thought that being married required so much compromising and tolerance?*

Todoroki being a team player was a given since the day he learned to accept the entirety of his Quirk back when he was in his first year of high school. As for Bakugou… He only acted as one when it benefited him in some way. While it could be said that having a visibly peaceful marriage with Todoroki was the best way to complete their 'mission', he still found it surprising how many times Bakugou had swallowed his pride in favour of compromising with his 'husband'.

Thinking about such things made Todoroki's chest feel so warm and itchy. It also gave him a certain degree of confidence that he'd one day manage to change his mind about their families. He had already gotten one 'yes' out of him, for as shaky as it might have been. Bakugou would follow through with it; that, Todoroki was sure of. He was also sure that meeting with his mother and older sister would be a very nice family gathering, a completely different experience when compared to meeting with just his father. That stark difference was perhaps the needed impetus to convince Bakugou to also host a family meeting with his mother and father, much like Mitsuki had requested. And speaking of which…

"Bakugou, have you already talked with-" Before that question could fully come out of his mouth, a phone started ringing. It wasn't Todoroki's, since he didn't feel any vibrations coming from his pocket, so it had to be Bakugou's. He briefly removed his gaze from the road

ahead of him and quickly glanced at his companion, who was just glaring daggers at the smartphone's screen rather than answering the incoming call. "You're not going to pick up?"

"Hell no. It's Dunce Face. There's only one reason he could be calling me right now, and I'm not falling for it," scoffed Bakugou, promptly sliding the pad of his index finger on the touchscreen to reject the call. That rejection would be a good enough 'Leave me alone!' message.

Yeah, I can see Kaminari calling Bakugou just so he can laugh at the little accident that happened during the press conference, sighed Todoroki to his own buttons. Given the scowl on Bakugou's face, he was better off saving that interrupted question for a later time. He seemed far too annoyed already to talk calmly about such things. *Still, Kaminari sure knows how to rub Bakugou the wrong way. First, he gave us a wedding gift like that, now he's calling because of the kiss and fall from the press conference. Bakugou will snap at him at this rate…*

Not that Todoroki could blame Kaminari much. Even if they knew that their marriage was just a means to an end, it was still a drastic and very sudden change for everyone. Then with that kiss and the fall and all the future couple acting while in public… Yes, the two of them would be the 'talk of the town' among their peers for a good while.

"Oh. Did you include our 'last resort' manoeuvre in the guidelines you sent them?" asked Todoroki, the kiss in question popping up in his mind yet again. No matter how busy they might be, their former classmates would definitely read through the documents Bakugou had sent them, if only to amuse themselves and get a good laugh out of their new 'relationship status'. They should be ready to answer any questions that come their way, but if they weren't informed beforehand about the kiss strategy (like Midoriya had), Todoroki could imagine them going insane because of what happened during the press conference.

"Huh? Why would I-" Before Bakugou could finish whatever he was

about to say, his phone yet again acted as an interruption, loudly ringing and buzzing while flashing a new name on the screen. “Tsk!”

It was Sero this time. Since it was coming right after Kaminari, that could only mean two things: either something bad had happened and he was seeking some serious advice from Bakugou, or they were all goofing off rather than working. Both were equally as likely, especially during a calm day where the biggest news going around was a relationship reveal.

Bakugou wasn’t one to take risky gambles where he wasn’t guaranteed a victory. After grumbling something under his breath, he finally picked up the call.

He really should not have.

“AHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA-”

Bakugou slid his finger against the red endcall button and slammed his smartphone screen down on his lap. A quick glance at his demonic facial expression told Todoroki everything he needed to know about that second-long phone call.

“I guess you didn’t tell them about it,” concluded Todoroki, voicing that observation more to himself than to his travelling companion. His next words were meant for Bakugou, though. “I’m surprised my father’s quick conversation with Uraraka went so well, then, given the circumstances. I’m even more surprised that you have her phone number and have it saved with a name that my father would recognise.”

“Why wouldn’t I have the phone number of my childhood friend’s girlfriend?” grumbled Bakugou with a fed-up eyeroll. Todoroki didn’t

say it out loud, but seeing it from that angle, he couldn't help but think 'fair enough'. "Also, compared to these clowns, Uraraka is actually useful and worthy of my respect, even if she has terrible taste in men. She also knows how to follow orders properly. I knew Endeavor would eventually get to a point where he'd interrogate our morons. I just needed him to do it in a controlled environment. So I baited him to do it now, using my phone. I also knew he'd look for the weakest 'link' in our friend group, which, for someone as antiquated as him, would always be the women. That's why I added a bit more info to the stuff I sent to Uraraka, Asui, Ashido, Hagakure, Jirou and Yaoyorozu, to warn them about this beforehand. But since I only have the private phone numbers of the first three, I made sure to change their contact info to the names your daddy dearest would recognise at a glance. The first step to scam someone without their knowledge is social engineering, something that is easier than stealing candy from a baby when it's being used against someone you know really well. All in all, this is why *I* should be the one making all of the plans from now on."

"This is exactly why that villain group wants to recruit you so badly, you mean?" deadpanned Todoroki, completely baffled at what he had just heard despite remaining as expressionless as usual. By now, he had lost count of how many times he had thought that Bakugou was as well-suited for villainy as he was to being a pro hero, and that the world should be so very thankful he was so fixated on being the latter. However, it had been a while since he last had front-row seats to one of Bakugou's genius displays of being extremely evil for the good of human society.

"Oh, shut it. It's not like I'm breaking any laws," scoffed Bakugou, promptly dismissing Todoroki's comments as inaccurate, no matter how truthful they might actually be. This small intermission helped him cool down a little bit, at the very least. He grabbed his phone again and opened the app they used for their Class A group chat.

He wasn't surprised at all to find there utter chaos. A significant number of them seemed to be currently online, and all of them were discussing one thing and one thing only: Bakugou, Todoroki, and the press conference. Some were actively sharing short clips and

screenshots of what was being spread around through social media, while others simply reacted to it all. Bakugou's sixth sense told him that, if this kept going without any grown-up supervision, these adult-sized brats would find a way to cause some serious trouble for him and Todoroki without meaning to. Hence, Bakugou typed a single message to all of them.

[Bakugou] *Keep this up, and every single one of you will be added to the hit list I'll be using once I join the villain side*

The reaction to such a threatening message was instant. The bustling group chat went completely silent for a few seconds. They must have been freaking out right about now. Once the shock faded and was replaced with a primal fear, the messages resumed, but only to send Bakugou apologetic words and stickers.

"Hmph, idiots, all of them…" mumbled Bakugou under his breath as he switched from the group chat app back to the map he was using to guide Todoroki. That issue seemed to be dealt with for the time being, and he could go back to focusing full-time on acquiring his new home. "Turn left on the street here. There's a small parking lot a few meters ahead. We can walk the rest of the way to the realtor's office."

"Got it," Todoroki acknowledged, smoothly steering the car in the direction Bakugou had pointed to. Much like it had been mentioned, they quickly found a small parking lot slotted between two buildings. They couldn't fit even a full dozen cars in such a small location, but luckily, there was one parking space still available. Their timing couldn't have been better. Todoroki could already feel a rush of excitement blossoming in the pits of his stomach as he turned off the car engine and removed his seat belt. "Is the parking here paid or free?"

"From what it says here, the first 30 minutes are free. We should be good to go," leisurely said Bakugou with a quick shrug. He too unbuckled his seat belt and got out of the car, exchanging its air-

conditioned interior with the muggy outside. The summer sun shone down on them intensely, its sunbeams feeling uncomfortably toasty against their skin. It was truly the perfect day to start their vacation. Bakugou put his sunglasses on and then gave a small jerk with his chin in the same direction from which they had come. “Let’s go, the building in question isn’t even a 5-minute walk from here.”

“Okay.” With that simple command, Todoroki obediently followed Bakugou’s lead, walking right next to him. While the streets here were much calmer compared to the crowded mess around Endeavor’s hero agency, plenty of passersby started gawking at them the moment they were recognised. Those news seemed to be circulating just as fast as they expected them to. *That means all of these people are under the impression that we’re a married couple, right?*

If that was the case, then was it really okay for them to just walk side-by-side? Wouldn’t it be more couple-y if they held hands or something along those lines? There might not be any reporters or paparazzi around, as far as Todoroki could tell, but the civilians looking at them were also a good way to accumulate more recognition in all sorts of social media websites and online forums.

Yeah, holding hands should be fine, concluded Todoroki in the back of his mind after that quick evaluation of the current environment they were in. With a single, swift sideways motion, Todoroki’s hand brushed against Bakugou’s right before he grabbed it.

“What are you doing now?” asked Bakugou, halting mid-step when an unexpected source of warmth captured his hand. He glanced downwards and observed their joined hands with the same curiosity and confusion of a biologist studying an alien life form.

“I figured holding hands would be okay,” explained Todoroki, his head innocently cocked to the left in response to Bakugou’s puzzlement. “There might not be any journalists here, but plenty of people around us right now will post about it online. Is this no good?”

"...Fine," sighed Bakugou after quickly assessing all the pros and cons of such an act. "But at least grab my other hand. I want my good arm to be free and available, just in case anything happens."

"Oh. Okay," said Todoroki, awkwardly letting go of Bakugou's hand. He walked around him from behind and, after settling on the opposite side, grabbed his right hand instead. Given the extensive damage he suffered in that arm during the big war against All for One and the League of Villains, it was understandable that Bakugou favoured his left arm more now. They might be off from work right now, but his 'husband' still had a large target on his back, so to speak, and needed to be on his guard whenever out in the open. Todoroki decided to keep that in mind from now on and use said knowledge during future handholding moments. "Is this better?"

"Yeah… I guess…" grumbled Bakugou, feeling uncharacteristically reticent about how to respond. He wasn't used to walking while holding hands with someone, which made this simple act feel awkward and slightly mechanical. On the other hand (no pun intended), it didn't feel bad or uncomfortable enough to make Bakugou want to yank his hand from Todoroki's grasp. It was something acceptable per their mission's terms, so Bakugou willed himself to be okay with it so long as his personal preferences were respected.

They peacefully walked like that for the next couple of minutes until they arrived at a tall, multistory building. The front door was of the glass, automatic type, offering a full view of the lobby area. The room was of simple build, with a couple of potted plants here and there, two elevators and a rectangular wooden board on one of the walls with the names of every single company and enterprise with an office in that building inscribed on it. A quick inspection of that board gave them the floor they needed to visit.

Their entrance into the elevator was probably the best chance they had to stop holding hands. Still, Todoroki's quietly fidgety excitement

left him unable to notice the right timing for it. He had been looking forward to doing this for so many days that he felt he could wake up from this dream come true at any moment now and experience the disappointment of a lifetime. The hand he was carefully holding was the only thing that grounded him to reality and reassured him that this was not a dream or a hallucination. In a way, he was experiencing the same delighted nervousness that he felt on the day he got married to his spouse.

“Bakugou,” called Todoroki just as Bakugou was pressing the button to the 8th floor, and the elevator’s door was sliding shut.

“What now?” sighed Bakugou, his gut already warning him that he was about to hear something absolutely ridiculous. And yes, part of that gut feeling was correct; the format in which it ended up being expressed was a bit different, though. Rather than a coherent but unhinged sentence, he got a small peck to his lips. His free hand moved so fast, it was nothing more than a blur as it hit the top of Todoroki’s head with a chopping motion and elicited a ‘ouch’ from him. “‘The heck are you doing!? How many times have I told you not to do that unless it’s necessary!?”

“Yeah, I’m awake,” confirmed Todoroki, nodding his head a single time while ignoring Bakugou’s admonishments. Both the kiss and the pain felt real, so this was indeed happening. That got him in a very good, extremely satisfied mood, much to Bakugou’s bafflement. Once the elevator’s door opened once again with a quick ‘ding’ sound, he nearly ran into the corridor, pulling Bakugou along with him.

“You seriously make absolutely no sense…” sighed Bakugou, completely losing his will to continue scolding that dense idiot. Neither words nor actions seemed to get through his thick skull. Why waste his time and breath with it? After so many years dealing with Todoroki day in and day out, Bakugou learned the best thing he could do to deal with this was to simply ignore him and move on. And that was precisely what he did this time, too.

Just like downstairs, the front door to the realtor's office was the stereotypical glass door, enclosed between two glass panels on the sides and one from above. The side glass panels were covered with different listings for apartments and houses in their current catalogue, both for renting and for sale. As far as they could tell, the apartment they planned on renting wasn't one of them.

"Be sure to behave yourself while in there, or the room you'll be moving into is the fuckin' balcony," whispered Bakugou between gritted teeth. The look in his blood-red eyes screamed loud and clear that this threat was not just empty words - Todoroki would truly be forced to sleep outside if he pulled any weird stunt. Interpreting Todoroki's silence as an acknowledgement, Bakugou slipped his hand from his grasp and used it to push the glass door open.

The 'newlywed couple' was welcomed into the realtor's office with open arms by a young receptionist. She had been notified that Bakugou would be coming by to sign the rental contract with one of their real estate agents, but since it was his real name that was used, she had no way to know who he was beforehand. However, with just a single glance at the two of them, she immediately recognised them as the two pro heroes that were currently trending in all sorts of corners of the internet and news channels. Just like she had been instructed, she notified the agent who was in charge of their property and then accompanied the two clients to the cushioned seats in the waiting area.

"Would you like anything to drink, like coffee or some tea?" offered the receptionist, a big smile on her lips.

"No, we're good. Thank you," declined Todoroki after a quick glance at Bakugou. He had been taking his sunglasses off while that exchange happened, but had shown no indication that he was interested in partaking in the offer. That concluded the receptionist's job, and so she returned to the front desk, every now and then looking over in their direction with eyes filled with excitement and curiosity.

That got Todoroki wondering - what exactly were people saying about them on social media and the news? This wasn't the first time he had been involved in a romantically inclined scandal, but it was the first time the truth was being shared through such means - even if said 'truth' was 100% fabricated for the purpose of their 'mission'. In the past, Todoroki simply denied those rumours, and that was about it. Those scandals were solved on their own due to a lack of evidence to support them. He didn't look more closely into them or take any special measures to correct those misguided beliefs. On the other hand, this time, they needed their scandal to blow out of proportion in a controlled manner. Their version of the 'truth' had to be shared everywhere until it was general public knowledge. And if possible, Todoroki wanted it to be seen as something positive rather than a shameful secret that had been exposed.

His coworkers' reaction was good. The journalists and reporters invited to the press conference were also very accepting for the most part. But what about the rest of the world?

Both he and Bakugou were popular pro heroes, each one in their own way and for different reasons. Due to his looks, Todoroki had obviously amassed a pretty big fanbase amongst the opposite gender. He was cheered on fervently by women of all ages and in all walks of life. He was also fairly popular with men, thanks to his strong Quirk, winning streak and aloof personality - the latter being something they considered to be a breath of fresh air among so many smiling, energetic pro heroes.

As for Bakugou, well… he was a harder case to analyse. He was undoubtedly popular, but more because he was indisputably one of the strongest pro heroes the country had ever seen. Since he went pro, he had no losses or accidents to speak of. He won every fight, saved any lives at risk, and made the world a better place just by being there. No one could accuse him of being bad at his job, had those been the only requirements and metrics. However, his personality wasn't a good match for the type of public role he had. Most people needed more than a flawless, strong hero to become a fan of theirs. Pro hero Dynamight didn't partake in publicity stunts, had a penchant for being very loud and brusque while speaking, and overall ignored and

avoided the mass media unless he was in a position where he had no other choice but to communicate with them. That translated into a lower popularity among those who weren't hardcore pro-hero fans, those really into daily news, people in the same industry as them or… a portion of the villain population.

While that meant that Bakugou had fewer fans when compared to Todoroki, the ones he had were certainly much more passionate and vocal about it - something that was as good as it could be bad, depending on which group that fan belonged to…

These two sets of wildly different factors were why Todoroki was so curious about what others were saying about their marriage announcement… or so he was interpreting this itchy curiosity that he was experiencing for the first time in his life. He could see some of his fans being disappointed that he was no longer single, in the same sense as what happened when a famous idol started dating someone, or some of Bakugou's more militaristically oriented fans complaining that they should focus on being heroes only, rather than entertain silly romantic bs. But, overall, he couldn't think of many reasons why they would be against their marriage. It was a sudden announcement, yes, but their unusual timing wasn't bad per se.

I really want to take a small peek, but… said Todoroki in the back of his mind, lifting his gaze from his pants' pocket to the man fast walking towards them. It was most likely the same real estate agent that Bakugou had been communicating with these past few days.

"W-Welcome, and I'm sorry to keep you waiting," stammered the real estate agent, oozing the same nervous energy of someone who wasn't confident about the feasibility of a deal. He politely gestured to them to follow him to a partially enclosed cubicle that was used to maintain some privacy during client meetings.

Both Todoroki and Bakugou had gone through this exact same process while looking for their respective apartments, so they already knew

what to expect and what to bring along with them. The only thing that was new and different for Todoroki was that, surprisingly, the real estate agent actually provided them with the summary of a police report linked to the property they were aiming to rent, calling it a full disclosure of the past of an akiya location. By how nervous and uncomfortable the real estate agent looked while going through this section of their meeting, it was obvious that this was the point where plenty of clients had changed their minds in the past. Todoroki was expecting to hear something along the lines of the apartment having been used as the headquarters of a serial killer or being the location of the grisly murder of an entire family. But it turned out that the elderly resident who was renting the apartment had died there from natural causes, which went unreported for a few weeks until the real estate agency noticed the missed rent payments and was unable to get in contact with them. Todoroki was beyond nonplussed by such an anticlimactic reveal.

It seems plenty of people are superstitious in the weirdest of ways, was Todoroki's main takeaway from this experience. Or maybe he was the weird one, having become accustomed to the concept of death after being involved in the pro hero world since high school… or was it maybe since he was a child being trained by his pro hero father? Whatever might be the case, he wasn't bothered by it, and Bakugou clearly didn't think much of it either. This apartment that everyone seemed to want to avoid was apparently the perfect fit for the two of them.

The relief in the real estate agent's eyes once he was told they'd still take the apartment was indescribable. It was as if they were taking a huge burden off his shoulders, which, in a way, was most likely true. Failing to make a deal over a specific property for years on end was probably taking its toll on his professional reputation and maybe even affecting his commission earnings. Getting rid of this 'cursed' apartment would become the highlight of his year, if not of his entire career.

From that point on, their meeting went on even more smoothly. All the background checks that needed to be done were successfully cleared, the rental contract was fully explained, and the initial

payments that needed to be made were discussed and completed. With that, the two of them were presented with the rental contract anew, as both of their names would be in it.

Todoroki once again felt that same thrilled rush that he experienced while he was filling in the papers for their courthouse marriage. It was truly fascinating how a single sheet of paper could make someone's heart beat so fast. That had to be the same experience that every adult went through when signing the documents to their new home, or so Todoroki concluded. This event was very pleasing indeed, and a smile would have been present on his face had he not been born with a perpetually expressionless demeanour.

I'm sure Bakugou is also quite happy with his new, bigger kitchen, happily noted Todoroki in the back of his mind, sliding the document against the table to pass it over to his new housemate. Bakugou was already holding a pen; all he had to do was sign the paper. That truly was all. However, Bakugou's hand halted, and his face furrowed just as the nib of the pen was about to touch the empty sign line. *Hm?*

Todoroki's body went stone-cold out of the blue. Could it be… Bakugou was starting to have second thoughts about moving in with him? Once that contract was signed, they would be legally bound to it. This was his last chance not to be involved in that rental with Todoroki. He could feel his heartbeat hammering against his ribcage, this time out of a frightened nervousness, but it calmed down somewhat when Bakugou's hand resumed its initial movement and quickly signed the papers.

In total, that hesitant pause hadn't lasted for more than a second or two, but its effects on Todoroki weren't as fast at fading away. The seed of doubt had been planted in him, and it would keep on growing until that brief incident was properly discussed. If there was something about living together with Todoroki that was bothering Bakugou, he wanted to openly talk about it with him and fix it now, so there wouldn't be any problems in the future. But Todoroki also knew that discussing such things while others were around would just annoy Bakugou, so he decided to wait.

He waited for the end of their meeting with the wholeheartedly thankful real estate agent. He waited for them to bid their farewells to the smiling receptionist. He waited for them to board the elevator a second time. And then…

“Was there any problem with the rental contract?” asked Todoroki the moment the door shut itself and the elevator quietly jolted into a downwards motion. That earned him an arched eyebrow and a silent ‘What?’ stare from Bakugou. “You hesitated a bit when it was time to sign it.”

Since Bakugou was staring straight at him, Todoroki got to see the precise moment his brain connected Todoroki’s question with his own memories. ‘Surprise’ wasn’t the right word to describe it; Bakugou had simply given away that there was some truth to those claims without meaning to.

“You’re overthinking it. There was nothing wrong with the contract,” grumbled Bakugou, promptly breaking eye contact with Todoroki in an obviously sulky manner.

But that wasn’t a good enough answer. He could tell as much from how intense Todoroki’s expressionless stare still was. Being inside a cramped, locked elevator that would still take a little while longer to reach the ground floor wasn’t helping him much either. Had it been anyone else in his place, the pressure alone would have made them fold instantly. But since this was Bakugou, he lasted long enough for the elevator to be right about to reach its destination.

“I’m just not used to it…” mumbled Bakugou, his face furrowing exactly like it had while they were signing the papers. “Writing my name right next to your family name feels kinda……. Argh, never mind that! There was nothing wrong! Stop overthinking! Shut up and drop dead already!”

Almost as if he had timed it perfectly, Bakugou started stomping forward just as the elevator door was smoothly sliding open. He didn't wait for Todoroki, and also didn't order him to get going. Bakugou simply rushed out of the tall building and into the street without looking back a single time.

"Oh. So it was the name…" said Todoroki, his words slipping out of his mouth rather than remaining as just thoughts in his brain. He was probably experiencing the same wave of pure relief and overwhelming comfort that their real estate agent had minutes prior.

The problem wasn't Todoroki or that they would be living together for a good while - Bakugou simply hadn't acclimated to using the Todoroki family name instead of his original one yet, which ultimately forced him to hesitate and think about how to sign that contract first, rather than go about it the same way he had throughout his entire life. That made sense. If Todoroki had been in his shoes, the same or worse would have probably also happened to him. They had only been married for four days, and such radical changes took some time until they became the new normal.

"Right. We're married… and Bakugou took my family name just to please and convince my father… so each time he signs something from now on, he'll have to use my family name instead of his…" mumbled Todoroki as he slowly, almost absentmindedly stepped outside of the elevator. He wasn't saying anything that he hadn't already known, but for some reason, it was hitting him much harder now compared to previous times - perhaps because every single step they had taken today had undoubtedly cemented their new marital status. Still standing right in front of the elevator, Todoroki crossed his arms over his chest and tilted his head in a contemplative stance. "Should I even be calling him Bakugou then…?"

"Hey, slowpoke! Our free 30 minutes are nearly ending!" Bakugou came yelling out of the blue, marching straight towards Todoroki like a furious bull chasing after a red piece of cloth. He grabbed the front

of his t-shirt and unceremoniously started dragging him outside the building. “I’m not about to be ticketed because of your inconvenient daydreaming moments!”

“I wasn’t daydrea-”

“Less backtalk and more walk!” hissed Bakugou, not allowing a single excuse to be hurled at him.

What else but shut up and sigh could Todoroki have done in response to Bakugou’s latest hissy fit? At the very least, he was free to mull over this new dilemma in the recesses of his mind…

Chapter 16

“I know I’m repeating myself here, but we really should be paying triple or maybe even quadruple what we’re currently paying,” deadpanned Todoroki, taking in his surroundings with both awe and hesitation. In front of him stood the living room and kitchen area of his new apartment, the lack of furniture showcasing how truly big that room alone was. “I’m starting to feel like we’re taking advantage of someone with such a low rent to such a wonderful apartment.”

“The only thing we’re taking advantage of is other people’s stupidity,” scoffed Bakugou with a quick, dismissive shrug of his shoulders. He, too, was calmly observing the room, though for a completely different reason - he was already planning where he would put this and that, and what he would need to purchase anew to bring out the full potential of all this space. “You saw how grateful that guy at the real estate agency was, right? We’re doing him a favour by renting this place that no one wants due to its background. What’s there to feel bad about that?”

“Yeah, you’ve got a point there,” acknowledged Todoroki after quickly thinking about it from that perspective. The real estate agent responsible for that property seemed wholeheartedly glad for them having picked this apartment, even after hearing a full disclosure regarding its previous occupant. Besides, the rental contract was done and signed. It was far too late to make any changes to it for the next 12 months.

Once they were done dealing with the rental contract for their new ‘home’, they went to a different real estate agency to sort out the early cancellation of Todoroki’s previous apartment. Seeing as that contract was also a yearly one, he had no choice but to eat up a fee for each month he was surrendering. Fortunately, Todoroki had enough savings to make such an expense nothing more than an annoying inconvenience that had no real repercussions on his livelihood.

After that task was scratched off from their to-do list, they decided to pass by their new apartment before proceeding with their move-out plans. It was located in an area of their city they didn't go to much, so navigating the streets and finding a place to park their temporary car was a challenge in its own right. Parking spots next to the sidewalk were a rarity in Japan, due to its strict laws on city planning and zoning. Actually, citizens were only able to purchase a vehicle if they could prove they had a property with the needed space to park said vehicle. Said laws were a testament to how needless car ownership was for everyone's daily life and how well their public transportation system worked as it moved millions of people every single day. But that was beside the point!

The parking spot they finally found after looking around for a while ended up being a couple of blocks away from the apartment. It was still within walking distance, and they were currently paparazzi-free, so they decided to walk there. It didn't take long for them to be recognised as the pro hero couple currently making headlines and trending on social media. Todoroki obviously capitalised on all those stares and excited whispers to once again hold Bakugou's hand without any pushback from his still-sulking spouse. Bakugou threw him a couple of warning glares, his crimson eyes pretty much telling him not to take their pseudo skinship too far just because there were other people around. Much to his disappointment, Todoroki relented and truly only held his preferred hand until they reached the apartment complex.

That was their first experience with the 'pro hero-grade security measures' that Bakugou had previously pandered to Todoroki while they were looking for a new marital home. The entrance area of the building was divided into two sections: an initial entrance area that only gave access to the mailboxes for all apartments, and the inner section that gave access to the elevators and stairs. To get inside the first section, you either rang a doorbell and waited for someone to unlock the door remotely, or you inserted the code in the keypad underneath the doorbells. The real estate agent had provided them with the codes at the moment of signing the rental contract, so Bakugou fished that paper from his pocket and pressed the code into the keypad. The front door readily unlocked with a clicking sound. The second door was akin to that of a fortress, made out of glass as thick as a human fist. It was debatable whether ramming a car into it

would shatter it or not, but a human would definitely not be able to so much as scratch it without the help of a really strong Quirk or some explosives. To unlock that door, they used one of the keycards they were provided with.

The rest of the trip to the top floor was done by elevator, making it extremely uneventful, and now here they were, getting their first official look at their new home.

“Yeah, this place definitely needs a good cleaning before we start living here,” said Bakugou after sliding his finger on the kitchen island physically signalling the end of the kitchen and the start of the living room. His finger came out coated in a layer of dark grey dust.

“That’s a given, no one has lived here for several years,” pointed out Todoroki, casually following Bakugou into the kitchen area. He already considered this part of the apartment to be solely Bakugou’s territory; that’s why he kept quiet and let him plot and plan to his heart’s content without any sort of interference.

“Well, we’re getting that done before we bring our things over,” instructed Bakugou, nodding to himself after confirming that the empty cupboards (the only furnishing in that spacious room) were all up to his standards. “It’s gonna be tomorrow’s main task. And don’t you dare think I’m the only one who’s busting ass getting it done. 50% of the cleaning will be on you, and you'd better do it well!”

“I have good cleaning standards,” declared Todoroki with an expressionless thumbs-up. When Bakugou gave him a doubtful glance, an eyebrow slightly arched, he added, “If you don’t believe me, feel free to come check my apartment today.”

“Hmph! I’ll think about it,” scoffed Bakugou, promptly turning his back on him to continue his inspection. He crossed the living room

area from one end to the other and only stopped once he reached the big floor-to-ceiling glass window, which was dubbing as the wall separating the inside of the apartment and the balcony. Next to it was a sliding door with a locking mechanism on the inside. Opening it allowed the lively noise of a bustling city to leak inside the otherwise silent apartment - the building's sound insulation also seemed to be up to snuff. Bakugou stepped down outside, his chest puffed out as he scanned his surroundings with his gaze. "Hell yeah, now we're talking."

"I thought the bigger kitchen was what sold this apartment for you," pointed out Todoroki, following his delighted 'husband' into the balcony. The scorching summer heat and the brightness of the sun made him start to sweat instantly. Such a bodily reaction was expected, as they were getting close to midday and the sun was about to reach its highest point in the blue, cloud-free sky.

"And you'd be thinking right, if you also add that steal of a price tag to it," snorted Bakugou, stopping right in the middle of the large balcony. It was big enough to fit at least six or seven cars in it, with a tall wall separating it from the next-door neighbours to foster everyone's right to privacy. The edges of the balcony were fenced in by a sturdy, modern-looking railing made out of glass and silver-coloured metal, to match the floor-to-ceiling window aesthetic. Bakugou placed both hands on his hips, a satisfied smirk on his lips as he went on. "But having a big balcony is a huge plus in my book. Now I don't need to go all the way to Best Jeanist's agency whenever I feel like getting some solo training done. I can just do it right here, so long as I don't use my Quirk much while I'm at it."

"Oh. Yeah, that's not a bad idea," noted Todoroki, already on board with that handy training strategy. They were smack dab in the middle of summer, which gave them ample months of weather agreeable with outdoor exercising. Maybe it could even mean they'd be able to train together, if their work schedules allowed. That final thought instantly turned him into a huge fan of that balcony.

After exploring the balcony together for a couple more minutes,

mainly to discuss how practical it also was in the eventuality of them being called in for an emergency and needing to depart from their apartment in a rush already all prepped up for action, they returned inside and closed the balcony door behind themselves. The final thing that needed to be checked was the rooms, two of which would be turned into their individual bedrooms.

While one of the rooms was clearly the master bedroom, as it also had a door that connected it to the balcony, there were hardly any differences between the two bedrooms. They were more or less of the same size and had similar layouts, each one featuring its own combined toilet and bathroom in a wet room style. They were as bare as the living room area, aside from the air conditioning units mounted on the walls.

“Alright, this is important, so take it seriously,” started Bakugou, a severe, no-nonsense expression on his frowning face. He gestured with his thumb to the doors of the two bedrooms, one at a time. “Who gets what?”

“I don’t really care either way. Feel free to pick whichever one you like the most, and I’ll take the other,” said Todoroki with a small shrug of his shoulders. He wanted to avoid putting his new roommate in a bad mood, and allowing Bakugou to have his way was the best way to do precisely that. Rather than start a fight over a bedroom, Todoroki preferred to take the diplomatic route and continue to let Bakugou have the first say on matters related to their apartment. After all, he had been acting pretty selfishly when it came to their fake romantic relationship. It was only fair that Bakugou could act the same way in matters not directly related to their mission.

However, by the looks of it, Bakugou was interpreting this diplomatic approach as a sign that something suspicious was going on. His gaze tightened as he closely studied Todoroki and his blank demeanour, trying to discern whether he was missing some important detail or was just overthinking it. He then looked at the two bedrooms, located right next to one another. Todoroki could almost see the cogs turning inside Bakugou’s brain.

"...I'll sleep on it and announce my decision tomorrow," grumbled Bakugou at long last, feeling far too suspicious to make up his mind on the spot. The sulky creases that had melted away thanks to his child-like enthusiasm over the kitchen and balcony were now back on his face.

Yeah, that's kinda funny, chuckled Todoroki in the back of his mind, his expressionless demeanour softening a little bit as he watched Bakugou turning around and opening the door to the final room of the apartment. Bakugou was usually pretty good at making split-second decisions, but he seemed to be taking their moving in together very seriously and cautiously. Todoroki couldn't tell whether he was doing it because technically it was part of their 'mission' or if there was something about that entire process that was making him keep his guard up. That was when a certain thought popped into his mind - a thought that he wasted no time in voicing out loud. "Oh, could it be you were expecting to argue with me over the bedrooms to make it fair?"

"H-Huh…!?" blurted out Bakugou, accidentally tripping over his own words out of shock. "Why… Why the heck would I be expecting something like that? If you're fine with either bedroom, you do you. But unlike a certain dense someone, I like to think before I act or make any long-term decisions!"

"....."

"Oh, c'mon! Don't you give me the 'yeah, right' silence!" hissed Bakugou, stomping his feet on the wooden floor while he stepped inside the final room. It wasn't as big as the previous two bedrooms, but it was still spacious enough to be turned into a nice office or whatever else they might need it for.

"If you want to argue about the bedrooms, we can argue about them,"

offered Todoroki, wholeheartedly feeling like laughing even though he could feel his face becoming even more expressionless. This was something he had figured out while they were still high school students, but purposely bickering with Bakugou over random stuff felt like quite the guilty pleasure. The main reason for it was that Bakugou could turn even the most innocent of statements into an invitation for a competition. As the sore loser that he was, Bakugou always took that very seriously and gave it his best to win, even if said competition was over something hilariously mundane. Some saw it as a character flaw; Todoroki viewed it as part of being on good terms with Bakugou.

"I already said that's not it!" Bakugou yet again stomped his foot on the floor, much like a little kid throwing a tantrum. At first, he crossed his arms over his chest while defiantly glaring straight at Todoroki, but he quickly undid that pose so he could point his index finger to the room opposite the one they were in. "Fine, you want me to make a decision right now? I'll make a decision right fuckin' now, then! I'll take that one; you can take the other room. Happy now?"

"Yeah, so long as you're also happy with that decision," acknowledged Todoroki, nodding his head along with his words.

"Grrrr…" Instead of being satisfied with that resolution, Bakugou felt even more aggravated about it. He knew Todoroki wasn't one to play mind games, but those words had been so annoyingly provocative (or so his brain had interpreted them) that he was made to doubt his decision all over again. However, he also couldn't bring himself to backtrack and reverse his previous statement. All in all, this was ballooning into a royal pain in the ass, which, again, made him even more suspicious of it all. "...You're doing that on purpose, aren't you?"

"Just a bit," truthfully confessed Todoroki. There was no use keeping the charade going now that he had been caught red-handed. In fact, if he pushed it any more than this, he'd be so very dead - Bakugou would make sure of it.

“Asshole…” cussed Bakugou right before he stomped out of the room, his pouting climbing up to a whole new level.

As was to be expected of someone who could throw hissy fits at random, he made sure to slam the door on his way out, shutting Todoroki inside the extra room all on his own. That allowed Todoroki to freely chuckle without running the risk of detonating a ticking time bomb. Not that he’d be staying there for very long. He quickly and easily composed himself and then calmly walked out of the room, once again closing the door to leave the room exactly as they had found it.

The apartment was considerably big, but it was still easy to find Bakugou once again. He was in the living room, lower back leaning on the kitchen island as he browsed through his smartphone with barely contained anger. There was a 50/50 chance that he was currently plotting the perfect murder, but Todoroki had great hopes to make it out of this fake marriage alive. Without uttering a single word, Todoroki walked up to Bakugou, stopped right next to him and then quietly stood there, back also facing the kitchen island.

A peaceful silence installed itself in the spacious division, despite the raging demon standing not even half a meter from him. Yes, this was exactly what it felt like being together with Bakugou, as far as Todoroki was concerned. Even if Bakugou was best described as ‘a genius evil gremlin that didn’t think twice about using someone’s weakness against them if it guaranteed him a perfect victory’, the time Todoroki spent with him was always peaceful and worry-free, but still engaging enough to never allow him to feel an iota of boredom.

They could be in an empty room, each one doing their own thing in complete silence, and Todoroki would still feel right at home.

“Shall we go back to our apartments and continue packing?” suggested Todoroki after he gave his ‘husband’ the required time for him to safely cool down without any unnecessary victims.

“Yeah…” grumbled Bakugou, locking his phone and slipping it back into his pocket. Aside from that, he didn’t make any attempts at moving. He just continued standing where he was, giving Todoroki a suspicious side-eye.

“...?” At first, Todoroki simply stared right back, patiently waiting for Bakugou to say whatever it was that he wanted to slap him with next. But the silence kept stretching longer and longer, with no clear signs of being about to end any time soon. Todoroki ended up being the one to break that status quo and speak first, even if it was just to say a single word. “What?”

“It’s nothing… I was just thinking to myself that you’ve been weirdly well-behaved since we left the first realtor's office…” commented Bakugou, quickly contradicting himself by providing a quick explanation of the ‘nothing’. It was hard to tell whether he had noticed that contradiction or not, but his raging demon expression had long softened into that of a child-like pout. When he saw Todoroki quizzically tilting his head, he felt slightly compelled to defend his claims, one way or another. “You’ve been going crazy with that ‘surprise kiss’ thing for several days now, but then you suddenly stopped. Of course that puts me on the defensive. Who knows what stupid little scheme is crossing that dense brain of yours right now… The only thing I can expect out of it is pure chaos and… Tsk, you know what? Never mind, let’s just get going and move on with our plans for today!”

“Wait,” said Todoroki, promptly straightening his position when he saw Bakugou pull his lower back away from the kitchen island and ready himself to leave. Either as a planned countermove or an unconscious reflex, Todoroki grabbed Bakugou’s lower arm and physically stopped him from departing from that spot. That obviously came alongside a moody glare from those unyielding crimson eyes, but Todoroki was so used to them that it didn’t faze him in the slightest. Even if he wasn’t used to it, he was far too preoccupied with something else to bother with that small detail. “If you want to kiss, you could have just said so.”

“.....Huh?” Bakugou blurted out, his mouth hanging wide open for several seconds as his brain processed such a ridiculous sentence. Once that processing was completed, the flabbergasted shock quickly morphed into a flustered tizzy. “W-When did I say something like that!? I was pointing out a discrepancy in your current behaviour, not giving you a clue on what I want or don’t want!”

“Uh-huh. I’ll keep that in mind, too, from now on,” deadpanned Todoroki, not really buying those flimsy excuses. Bakugou was the type who kept quiet whenever someone conveniently forgot about something he wasn’t on board with, not the type who reported on it like a goody two-shoes. Hence, even if Todoroki wasn’t that good at reading others, Bakugou was being awfully transparent at the moment.

“Argh, whatever!” groaned Bakugou, rolling his eyes around at Todoroki while he turned back around and tried to continue to move ahead. The keyword here was ‘tried to’. Todoroki was still holding his arm, which made it impossible to carry out his escape plan smoothly. This awkward situation got even more complicated when Todoroki tugged his arm in the opposite direction he wanted to go. The last nail in his coffin was when Todoroki slipped his free hand onto the front of his neck, which was followed by him forcibly tilting his chin up and, as a result, his head backwards. “Wah…!”

Arms flailing, Bakugou took a couple of unsteady half-steps in reverse until his back bumped against Todoroki’s chest. His head still remained tilted backwards, which shaved off a couple of centimetres from his usual height and facilitated Todoroki towering over him. Despite the inelegant angle, Todoroki still somewhat managed to drop a quick peck on his lips from above.

“Am I back to normal now?” asked Todoroki, separating their faces just enough to be able to see the entirety of Bakugou’s features.

“T-T-There’s nothing normal about any of this…!!!” hissed Bakugou, mechanically ripping Todoroki’s hand away from his neck and chin. That enabled him to straighten his position and then also slip his arm from Todoroki’s grasp. “Which part of the ‘don’t do this unless there’s a really good reason for it’ does your dense brain refuse to understand!?”

“There might not be a direct reason for it, but thanks to all the practice we’ve been getting when it’s just the two of us, we’ve successfully fooled everyone into thinking we’re really dating, right?” Todoroki pointed out calmly and methodically, also questioning himself on why his fake spouse couldn’t connect their current success with all of these seemingly unnecessary affectionate acts. “Well, almost everyone. My father still isn’t ready to admit his defeat, but I already see some cracks forming. If we keep going like this and improve how much of a lovey-dovey newlywed couple we seem to be while out in public, I can see us having a breakthrough on that front, too. Plus, we’re married. A couple of surprise kisses throughout the day is within reasonable expectation, isn’t it?”

“No, it’s… not…?” Bakugou began denying that claim on reflex, but, just like it had happened during prior conversations, his certain, domineering tone slowly turned into a question filled with doubt. Whenever he went over this topic from a logical point of view, he couldn’t find any faults in Todoroki’s arguments and conclusions. But, again, there was this small voice in the back of his mind telling him that he was missing a fairly important point. It was truly a pity he had banished that small voice into a remote section of his brain on day 1 of their fake marriage. Thanks to that banishment, Bakugou was able to ignore the majority of it, but the itchy impression it left behind was impossible to erase. “...There’s something about that that doesn’t feel right…”

“Yeah, I think so too,” acknowledged Todoroki with a hearty nod of his head, finally having confirmed he and Bakugou were experiencing the exact same phenomenon. “But I think it’s just because we’re not used to it. Once we’ve mastered this technique, that weird feeling will probably go away. Oh, but… If it bothers you that much, I can limit it to just once a day. I don’t know how that will affect our mission,

though…”

“No, I’d rather go all out straight from the start than to take it slow and drag this on for a stupid amount of time,” said Bakugou, promptly shooting down the ‘once a day only’ concession. He quieted down and thought about this matter for a couple of seconds more, but then ultimately just sighed tiredly. “Just keep on doing what you’ve been doing this whole time. It’s clearly working, so I can’t complain too much about it. But we’re stopping this right away if it loses its effectiveness, alright? This can’t be the only method to improve our acting skills.”

“Okay,” concurred Todoroki with one more nod. He gently grabbed Bakugou’s hand, purposely picking the one his spouse had a preference for, and started guiding them towards the entrance area of the apartment. “What other methods do you have in mind?”

“I don’t know, I’d have to think about it first,” sighed Bakugou after giving a quick shrug with his shoulders. He followed along without complaint, too focused on their ongoing discussion to notice that he, too, had long started holding Todoroki’s hand back. “Acting classes are out of the question, obviously. And I ain’t about to waste my time watching videos or listening to podcasts of so-called ‘love gurus’.”

“I can’t think of anything else but what we’re already doing from the top of my head,” admitted Todoroki, doing his best to come up with an alternative plan but coming out empty-handed. “Maybe we should ask Midoriya and Uraraka. They’re a real couple, so they might be able to give us some good suggestions.”

“Hell no!” hissed Bakugou right away, throwing a dirty glare at Todoroki as he waited for him to lock the front door. “Fake relationship or not, I’m definitely not going to use that shitty nerd as inspiration! Ugh, just the thought of asking Izuku for advice on something is turning my stomach inside out…”

“That might be because you haven’t eaten anything since breakfast,” chuckled Todoroki, not feeling all that downtrodden by yet another vetoed suggestion. “Let’s go back to our apartments, eat lunch and then continue with the packing.”

“Don’t forget we still need to deal with the horde of journalists and paparazzi that will definitely be waiting for us at our doorstep,” pointed out Bakugou, his eyebrow twitching with annoyance at the thought of such a troublesome reception. “Now that I think about it, that’s also your fault. Why the heck aren’t you more careful whenever you go somewhere? I know you’re a bit slow in the head, but even the dumbest of our morons know how not to dox themselves.”

“I didn’t do it on purpose. It just somehow happened when I was being followed around by this particularly stubborn paparazzi shortly after rumours about me and a staff member of my father’s hero agency started being spread on social media,” explained Todoroki, his voice and face becoming more expressionless as he recalled that tiring story. “That eventually died down, but not before my address was exposed. I thought about moving somewhere else several times, but it was just too much of a hassle. It’s not like I’ve been constantly visited or harassed by journalists and fans alike, so I let it be until now.”

“That’s the most ‘you’ thing you’ve said this whole morning,” snorted Bakugou, a smile lingering on his lips despite the sarcastic tone of his words. “Well, thanks to you being a half-assed, lazy idiot, I got to enjoy my time at home in peace and quiet. So, again, thank you for your sacrifice.”

“I kinda think it’s a pity you didn’t tell me you were my downstairs neighbour sooner, though,” was what Todoroki wanted to say next, but it was pretty hard to speak under these circumstances. He was far too busy committing to memory one more of Bakugou’s extremely rare, wholesome smiles to do anything else.

Some people collected books, others coins, and some went for pricey anime figures. Todoroki's one and only collection was moments like this one, where he got to see a softer side of Bakugou that very few people had the luxury of witnessing in person.

Chapter 17

“Um… We really are being successful with our mission,” deadpanned Todoroki in an attempt to quell Bakugou’s anger preemptively. The thing is, Todoroki completely disregarded the fact that anything he might or might not say would only stoke whatever negative emotions Bakugou was feeling.

“The day murder becomes legal, you will be the first one to go,” hissed Bakugou between gritted teeth. He promptly whipped his hand up and gestured his trembling (from anger) index finger at the scene unfolding further down the other side of the car’s windshield. “You call that successful!? It’s a fucking mob! I see more cameras and reporters in front of our apartment complex than there usually are in front of the freaking National Diet Building!!!”

“C’mon, there aren’t that… No, you’re right, there are more,” Todoroki started anew, giving his ‘defusing the bomb before it explodes’ strategy a second try. But a single sideways glare from Bakugou made him reverse course instantly and roll over like an obedient puppy. Arguing was definitely not going to work in this situation. Todoroki sighed. “So, what should we do about this? At this rate, we’ll get surrounded the moment we try to go inside our apartments.”

“Oh, I don’t know. You fucked up, YOU FIX IT!” sarcastically scoffed Bakugou, turning his head in the opposite direction where Todoroki was quietly sitting at the driver’s seat.

They were currently inside the vehicle Burnin had lent them, the hazard lights blinking as they remained precariously parked by the sidewalk, keeping a close lookout on the surroundings of their apartment complex so they could properly plan the next phase of their ‘mission’: getting inside their apartments without getting relentlessly interrogated by the reporters, journalists and paparazzi currently stalking them.

Their biggest issue with this ‘phase’, as we can call it, was that there was now this gigantic crowd right in front of the apartment complex. Some people were clearly just big fans who wanted to see the ‘newlywed couple’ in person, but most were pros hunting for their next big scoop, carrying cameras and other types of recording equipment in tow. The sidewalk right before the building was nearly completely clogged with that horde of salivating beasts, to the point that those simply walking by had to cross the road and use the opposite sidewalk.

Initially, Bakugou and Todoroki had agreed to drive by their street to first scout the area before making a definite move. But they were so flabbergasted by that horrifying sight that they had to turn around and then temporarily park the car to study that humongous problem from a safe distance.

“Calling the police on them for being a public nuisance wouldn’t work, would it?” suggested Todoroki with a certain hesitation. The way Bakugou’s shoulders were dismissively shrugged was answer enough. “Right, that would only make them more clever with their stalking tactics. What should we do, then? I already know you don’t want us to use our Quirks, but what else is there left for us to do?”

“Ugh, you’re useless!” groaned Bakugou, his rough voice dripping with annoyance and exasperation. “Turn on the engine! Let’s find a proper parking spot first and then move from there.”

“Okay?” acknowledged Todoroki, immediately doing as told despite having a few questions. However, years of knowing and working with Bakugou had taught him that obeying his instructions more often than not led to glorious success. As such, annoying him with questions was just a waste of time and of his fraying patience.

Since they both knew that neighbourhood of their city extremely well,

it was easy for them to find a parking lot that did not belong to a private housing complex. It would maybe take them 10 to 15 minutes to walk from there to their apartments. However, rather than go straight there using the most direct path, Bakugou forced them to pick the longest route home. Todoroki was just as confused then as he had been while driving to the parking lot.

"Hm… Yeah, we're close enough," Bakugou mumbled to himself while sneaking a peek into the main street from the side street where they were currently taking shelter. From there, he could see the exterior 'people wall' of the crowd surrounding the front door of their apartment complex, even if from a considerable distance. He then withdrew back to the narrow side street while taking his smartphone from his pocket.

"…?" As far as Todoroki was concerned, there was no rhyme or reason to Bakugou's actions, let alone now that he was calmly fiddling with his cellphone. Still, he knew not to interfere with whatever it was that he was confidently plotting.

Once Bakugou was done typing something into his smartphone, he thrust the arm holding it closer to the main street while also leaning his head in the opposite direction to put some distance between himself and the electronic device. Without any warning, a booming female voice started echoing all around them, startling Todoroki into a more guarded stance.

"What!? Dynamight and Shouto are talking with fans at the park down the street!? I wanna go, I wanna go! Save me a spot there!"

Todoroki looked around in confusion, trying to figure out who exactly was speaking, but there was no one, let alone a woman, close enough to them to hear such a line that loudly. Since he was already on his guard, he was quick to notice the slight shift happening on the main street. The bustling atmosphere momentarily quietened down following that booming line, with several passersby doing exactly as

Todoroki was and inspecting their surroundings to figure out who was speaking so loudly. Seconds after that short-lived respite started, chaos erupted.

“Hehehe… Ain’t technology amazing?” gleefully giggled Bakugou, an evil smirk on his lips as he calmly observed that gigantic mob of people and all of their bulky recording equipment running down the main street towards a nearby park. Their heavy footsteps sounded more like a herd of panicked elephants than an overexcited crowd, and Bakugou enjoyed every little second of it from the safety of the strait side street. Once the metaphorical cloud of dust had settled, Bakugou stepped into the main street like normal and began walking towards their apartment complex.

“.....” Todoroki stood in place in silent awe, his heterochromatic eyes following Bakugou’s back until he disappeared from his sight. He might have just witnessed one of the many ways Bakugou used misdirection to steer clear of journalists and paparazzi. Todoroki followed after him just a moment later and, sure enough, as soon as he also stepped into the main street, he could tell right away it was much emptier and calmer. The mob that had set camp right in front of their apartment complex was gone, leaving in their wake the whispers of those who had witnessed their abrupt departure. Todoroki quickly caught up with Bakugou and asked, “Is this how you…?”

“Yup. Start taking notes, I won’t always be around to save the day,” said Bakugou with a dismissive shrug of his shoulders. He had no idea how long it would take the reporters to notice they had been bamboozled, so he made sure to walk as fast as possible without raising any suspicion.

“No wonder you’ve been hinting that my living in the same building as you has helped you these past two years,” deadpanned Todoroki, starting to connect several dots. “You’ve been using me as a distraction to sneak inside the apartment complex without being spotted, haven’t you?”

“Heh, who knows?” snickered Bakugou, his evil smirk once again back on his lips. “A magician can’t reveal how he plays his magic tricks or else they won’t work as well as they currently do, right?”

“You’re so…” sighed Todoroki, feeling quite conflicted about how he should interpret that half-confession. He really wanted to ask him how he came up with such a strategy, but he could already tell Bakugou would not be sharing that sort of convenient information with him. *Maybe I should also read some books about magic tricks and misdirection…*

With their fast walking speed, they reached their apartment complex in less than a minute. They unlocked the front door with the code they knew by heart after using it every day for such a long time. Just to make sure, Todoroki double-checked the front door and its locking mechanism once they were inside. It wouldn’t be fun if one of the more immoral paparazzi tried to break into the building. But from what he could tell, the front door was well secured, even if in a much simpler way compared to their new apartment complex, and there were no signs of any lockpicking attempts either.

“Tomorrow, we’re cleaning our new place. Meanwhile, make sure you continue packing your stuff. Given the circumstances, we should do the move in a single go, to avoid needing to come back and forth between our apartment buildings,” instructed Bakugou throughout the short elevator trip. When the elevator made its first stop and the door slid open, he stepped into his floor and then turned around to look at Todoroki. “Whatever you do, no matter how much they annoy and pester you, you better not directly tell those stalkers I also live here! Let them create wild theories and whatnot until they figure it out all on their own! Also, if you do end up talking with them, don’t. Make. This. Even. WORSE! Got it? Great! Bye then!”

After those barking parting words, Bakugou turned back around once again and started stomping towards his apartment, missing completely the disappointed ‘Okay…’ Todoroki mumbled as the elevator sealed itself once again.

The moment Bakugou unlocked his front door and entered his apartment, he let out a long, tired sigh. Somehow, one way or another, he managed to make it out of that insane press conference and everything that followed alive. For someone like him, these past few hours had been far more challenging than all of the risky missions he had participated in since he went pro combined. His stress levels were through the roof, but fortunately, he was good at managing that sort of pressure without cracking.

"Ugh, I can't wait for this portion of our 'mission' to be done and dealt with…" Bakugou mumbled under his breath as he dived deeper into his apartment. Since he had the habit of waking up early on 'working days', he had already begun packing his stuff. One of the corners of his living room was filled with several boxes already storing some of his belongings. That made his surroundings seem crammed and disorganised, but he would have to tolerate it for the time being.

He wanted to vent some of the accumulated stress by being productive with his time, but a lunch break had to be prioritised before his venting session could start. It wasn't that Bakugou was in a cranky mood because he was hungry, much like Todoroki had pointed out earlier, but he recognised that packing with an empty stomach would make him much slower and less focused, which would completely defeat the purpose.

I should try to use up as much frozen stuff as I can. There's no way they'll survive being moved from one apartment to the other in this stupid hot weather, and I ain't about to risk food poisoning myself, noted Bakugou in the back of his mind as he moved around the kitchen with practised movements. After three years of living there, he could cook a quick meal for one in that kitchen with his eyes closed. He had developed the habit of freezing a portion of his leftovers rather than eating the same stuff for several days in a row - one of the downsides of the impossible-to-tackle challenge of cooking for just one - so he had an array of pre-cooked dishes he could combine with freshly cooked ones.

In a matter of 15 minutes, Bakugou was ready to finally sit down and not worry about anything. Relaxing and forgetting that morning's chaos was the only thing occupying his mind. He even decided to turn on the TV and find something to distract him while he indulged in his Michelin-grade home-cooked lunch.

However, Bakugou's peaceful meal time was shattered real fast when he changed the channel in search of the ideal meal companion.

He was used to seeing himself on the TV screen, as being in the news was just a part of being a pro hero. What he wasn't as used to was seeing himself being kissed and pushed down a chair in full HD. Bakugou promptly changed the TV channel once again… only to be greeted by that exact same scene, but from a different camera angle. He changed the channel a third time and, you guessed it, kiss scene galore all over again.

"Are you fucking kidding me!?" growled Bakugou, slamming the remote control against the dining table. It was a miracle he managed to keep his anger under control and didn't catapult the remote control against the TV screen with an explosive throw. "Do these guys seriously have nothing better to do with their time!? If they are that free, why not do something that contributes to the world and human society, instead of wasting it on stupid romance BS!? Argh, this is exactly why I hate the mass media!!!"

Fed up with that nonsense, Bakugou changed the channel once again, this time picking one that had absolutely nothing to do with news. He'd rather watch paint dry than see that catastrophic kiss scene between himself and Todoroki one more time. Fortunately, he managed to find something far more interesting and engaging than that in the form of a history documentary covering certain events that occurred before the emergence of Quirk. It wasn't exactly something he would normally go out of his way to consume, but anything was better than that other torture.

The steady, baritone voice of the narrator distracted him enough that he could calm down and actually savour his meal. It wasn't every day he could sit down to eat his lunch while technically on a work day (yes, he was officially on vacation, but Bakugou saw their unofficial mission as the same as a regular one), he should enjoy it while it lasted.

Besides, now that he was thinking about it with a tranquil mind, the fact that the news channels were covering their press conference so extensively was a good thing. Social media aside, it was important that their relationship was brought to light through official mediums. Even if the members of the villain group who worshipped him as a god didn't use social media, they definitely needed to check either TV, radio or online news to keep a tab on him. Newspapers and magazines were also a good source of information on him and his movements, but they came with a delay, making them not as useful whenever speed and timing were crucial.

For as aggravating as it might be for him, Bakugou did have to admit that the kiss was the biggest highlight of the press conference, maybe only second to the announcement that they had gotten married the previous week. And if those two things had left the entire country in an uproar, then it certainly was also having a significant impact on the villain group. It was just a matter of time until they made their next move and tried to get in contact with Bakugou in some form.

Well, I know we'll be safe and sound while we're in here, with these many cameras and witnesses at our doorstep, pointed out Bakugou in the back of his mind, leading his chopsticks into his mouth and then chewing on his flavourful food. *Tomorrow we'll be on cleaning duty, so we won't be too exposed to the outside world either. That will give them at least 48 hours to plan something. Wednesday will be when things might start getting serious… They might pull some crappy stunt at any moment, so I'd really like to get the moving done before the end of that day. It would also mean we could dedicate the rest of our vacation to capturing and arresting as many members as we can, while also gathering information to take them down for good.*

Of course, that was all easier said than done. No amount of planning on Bakugou's behalf could fully account for the villain group's upcoming moves. They could do something while they were on vacation, just like they could wait for him to go back to work the following week. It was all a huge guessing game, and Bakugou was at a disadvantage due to how little he knew about the villain group and its members.

It would be easier if he knew of a way to gain some control over when and where they appeared, just like he had done earlier with the herd of journalists and paparazzi, but that was outside of the scope of his manipulation skills. Neither misdirection nor bait worked on them - he had tried doing as much a couple of times already, and the results were always painfully disappointing.

"I wish those lunatics were as dumb as their delusions make them sound, but no, they're too smart for their own good…" grumbled Bakugou, a frown starting to show on his face once again. He was going to put one more mouthful of food into his mouth when his hand froze midway there.

The members of the villain group were smart. All of them. They sounded crazy, but they acted with purpose. They didn't fall for undercover agents or allow themselves to be followed. They also didn't fall for any of the traps Bakugou had set up so far.

In that case, would they truly believe he had married Todoroki after secretly dating him this whole time? When they couldn't even make Endeavor trust that their marriage certificate was real?

"Crap… What if they don't fall for it…?" mumbled Bakugou, the hand holding the chopsticks falling back to the dining table. Their mission revolved around their fake marriage looking like a genuine relationship to everyone else, save for their friends and immediate family. But if they managed to fool everyone except for the people they needed to fool the most, then all of it would have been for

nothing…

Once that seed of doubt burrowed into his mind, Bakugou was unable to stop thinking about it. Neither of them had any proper acting experience, so it would be impossible for them to pull off a flawless performance. He had been aware of that since the very moment he accepted Todoroki's offer. But he figured that maybe they'd be able to keep it going without being caught since they only needed to pretend whenever they were outside in public together. Which, with their usual pro hero schedule, would be nothing more than a handful of hours per week. With so few hours of exposure, it would be fairly easy to create this elaborate lie and convince other people they were truly in a romantic relationship.

Despite that, Endeavor still hadn't fallen for it, even after kiss after kiss right before his eyes. And Endeavour could be just as dense as his son at times. Everyone else, aside from him, had just accepted it, congratulated them and moved on with their day. So if they couldn't fool that dense, stubborn old man, fooling a group filled with smart delusional villains would be ten times harder than convincing Endeavour will turn out to be.

That meant they had no choice but to be ten times more convincing with their fake relationship while out in public…

"But how are we even supposed to do that…?" sighed Bakugou, his hand clenching his chopsticks more tightly.

It wasn't as if he was interested in dating anyone for real when he was already so busy being a pro hero. Romance just wasn't in the cards for him, and, as such, he completely ignored such a subject in his day-to-day life. Faking it with Todoroki was acceptable under the current terms, but all he could think of to use in their mission were the most basic of things related to being in a relationship, like holding hands, kissing, and so on.

What else did people who were actually in love do with their partners? Was there anything else about a couple that signalled they were a couple to other people? Those were all questions that Bakugou and his lack of romantic experience were unable to answer.

"I'm never going to stoop so low I'd ask the Shitty Nerd for his help, but…" grumbled Bakugou to his own buttons, a pinkish pouty expression blossoming on his face at the same time as his gaze dropped to the remote control. "If I can use technology to deploy misdirection against those professional stalkers, then I should also be able to use it to fake this fake relationship better… There's hardly any difference between voice generator apps and crappy romance TV shows and movies… So using either is the same thing…"

Bakugou kept on intently staring at the remote control, his body as still as a stone sculpture, but his heart speeding as fast as the pneumatic hammer that had mined that stone. It was just research, he was telling himself. In the same way he was learning from the history documentary he was watching during lunch, he could also learn a few things by studying actors and how they acted to portray couples and the like, Bakugou rationalised.

"I'll at least give it a shot, I guess…" concluded Bakugou after what felt like a lifetime of staring at the remote control. He finally picked it up and changed channel after channel, until he finally reached one that mainly aired TV shows nearly the whole day. Whatever was on at the moment would do; Bakugou was only going to watch it to study the actors, after all.

Just as he was relaxing once again and calming down his fastened heartbeat, his doorbell suddenly rang and nearly scared the bejesus out of him. His whole body jumped in his seat, and the remote control nearly slipped out of his hand. The heat of shame instantly assaulted his face, which burned into a scarlet blush at the same time he hurriedly turned off the TV with flustered movements.

Soon after, he heard a familiar knocking sound. It was clearly Todoroki who had come for yet another unannounced visit.

“Fucking Half-and-Half Bastard and his stupid bad timing…” grumbled Bakugou, getting up from the dining table in a single motion. He slammed the chopsticks on the table and then started stomping towards the front door. Bakugou ended up venting just 0.001% of his frustration with the way he yanked the door open and screamed, “WHAT NOW!?”

“They know we’re in here. They won’t stop ringing my doorbell,” said Todoroki with his usual calm, expressionless demeanour. In his hands, he was carrying two plates with his steaming lunch. “Can I finish eating my lunch here? Hearing the doorbell constantly is starting to get annoying…”

“Welcome to my life!” Bakugou snapped back before viciously slamming the door shut on Todoroki’s face.

Chapter 18

“Seriously, why is everyone around me such a pain in the ass, from the people I work with to the random extras in the street…” grumbled Bakugou, begrudgingly stabbing his chopsticks on his food again and again. “Someone needs to create a ‘patience’ category in the Hero Billboard Chart ratings… I’d be number one every single damn day… And then I’d at least receive awards and prizes for it, instead of having to do it FOR FREE… Heck, I might even become the very first saint of the Quirk era… I don’t care if it comes posthumously so long as the title is mine and mine only… What I do care about is why the fuck are you interrupting my detailed schedule just because you can’t deal with the consequences of your actions! It’s your fault that all of those professional stalkers and fans are banging at the building’s front door and raping your doorbell! If it bothers you that much, just deal with them already, not hide in my apartment! Your fault, your problem!”

“How many times will I have to apologise until you drop this blame narrative of yours?” deadpanned Todoroki after he calmly finished chewing and swallowing the food he had in his mouth.

“I am never letting you live this one down, especially while it’s still causing us trouble!” hissed Bakugou, banging his free hand on the dining table. His raging red eyes were finally lifted from his half-eaten lunch, and their gaze was redirected forward, to the expressionless pro hero sitting opposite him. “Rather than talk back to me, why don’t you do it to those annoyances outside, huh? Go ahead, call the police on them and have them arrested for disorderly conduct and harassment! It’s your hero name that will be known for being against freedom of the press, so it’s no skin off my back! You can even ask one of your sidekicks or whatever to pass by here and shoo them away! I don’t care what you do, just do it somewhere else!”

“Maybe we should have gone to a hotel or something instead of coming here,” sighed Todoroki, as cool as a cucumber as he ignored 90% of what Bakugou had just yelled at him. “They would get rid of them much more easily by accusing them of inconveniencing their business.”

“Like hell we should have,” scoffed Bakugou right away before finally putting some food in his mouth and angrily munching on it. “We need to prepare for the move, and we also need them around during the move. We already created a plan and we’re gonna follow it, no matter how big a bother it might be!”

“Yeah, but you said it yourself that the effect the press conference had was way bigger and messier than what we had accounted for,” pointed out Todoroki after another small sigh. “We might need to add some flexibility to the plans we’ve made. At least for the first few days, when our marriage announcement is still breaking news.”

“No, we’re following *my* plan like *I* created it, and that’s final,” ordered Bakugou with the seriousness and fury of someone willing to die on the hill they had stubbornly built by hand.

There’s no use arguing with him when he’s running on anger and pettiness, sighed Todoroki in the back of his mind. The only thing he could do right now was to give up on this discussion and maybe bring it up once again at a later time when Bakugou wasn’t in the mood to verbally destroy anyone who so much as breathed in his direction. He also didn’t want to get kicked out of his apartment after he somehow managed to convince Bakugou to let him in and eat lunch together. In other words, Todoroki needed to be in his best behaviour for the time being. *Why don’t I give him something to distract us both while I wait for him to cool down on his own?*

While Todoroki might have been quite limited on what sort of things he could say or do, he had a good source of distraction within his reach. So he nonchalantly grabbed the remote control on top of the dining table and pressed the on button.

“Wai-!” Fully aware that the TV would be turned on on the same channel it had been turned off, Bakugou tried to stop Todoroki from

doing precisely that. However, he was a second too late.

The black screen of the TV exploded into a myriad of colours, portraying a high-resolution image of the show currently being aired. Since Bakugou had changed the channel to one that mainly focused on TV shows meant for the entertainment of the masses, that was exactly what they got. The lunchtime period was one of the premium time slots with the biggest number of watchers, so what was currently airing was one of the newest TV dramas from a popular producer. Their motto was 'we'll melt the most frivolous of hearts,' and the first scene they coincidentally got did that motto justice. What was probably one of the couples featured in the TV show was gushing over each other in a sickly sweet, obnoxiously lovey-dovey manner. In the back of his mind, Bakugou really hoped that was an exaggeration and real couples did not behave in such an annoying way, or he'd willingly join the evil side without complaint.

"Just for the record, I was not watching that crap, alright!?" hissed Bakugou in his own defence, even though Todoroki hadn't so much as glanced his way.

"I didn't say you-"

"I was studying it, just that!" continued Bakugou, accidentally cutting Todoroki off before he could finish his sentence. "Actually, I wasn't even studying 'it', I was studying the actors! I couldn't care less about the sappy story or the lame characters, I just want to learn from their acting skills!"

"Okay?" said Todoroki, a bit confused as to why Bakugou was bringing up such an unusual topic completely unprompted. Also, why was he even studying the actors' acting skills? It wasn't as if he was aiming to become one himself or anything. Todoroki tilted his head quizzically and asked, "Why, though?"

“What do you mean, why!? It’s obviously because of our mission, you idiot!” scoffed Bakugou, rolling his eyes at Todoroki and his oblivious brain. “If we’re gonna put on a performance, we might as well do it really well and in a believable way. Endeavor might be stubborn as hell and just as dense as you, but those lunatics unfortunately have working brains. They won’t fall for it if we half-ass our fake relationship, no matter how many normies we might deceive in the process!”

“Hmm… I guess you have a point,” admitted Todoroki after thinking about it for a few seconds. He straightened his head and closely observed the lovey-dovey scene unfolding on the TV screen. Todoroki then looked back at Bakugou while pointing at the TV. “So you want to act like this while we’re in public?”

“Not even over my dead body!” yelped Bakugou, feeling queasy at the thought of acting like a silly, annoying couple out in public with someone, let alone with Todoroki. “If you want to make a fool of yourself in front of other people, go right ahead. But don’t you dare drag me into it!”

“Then what exactly do you mean by ‘studying the actors’ for the sake of our mission?” asked Todoroki, once again confused by Bakugou’s contradictory words. He wanted to study actors to improve their performance in their unofficial mission, but he didn’t want to copy what they were acting out in the TV shows he was consuming for that purpose? Yeah, Todoroki truly did not comprehend what exactly Bakugou was trying to accomplish with this.

“Well… You know… It’s that thing we were talking about before, and the like,” grumbled Bakugou, his words going around in a circle without ever giving a definite response. However, the time he wasted with that allowed him to come up with something less… weird. “It’s just the acting skills we want, right? Why would we copy stuff that doesn’t even match our personalities and usual behaviour? That would be the same as admitting we’re just pretending.”

“Oh, that’s true,” acknowledged Todoroki with a brief nod of his head. Bakugou certainly had a point there - if they were to copy one-for-one what that fictional couple was doing, everyone would probably think they either were hit by some sort of Quirk or had gone insane. In the worst-case scenario, their fake marriage would be exposed, and they would start a whole new controversy, this time a damaging one. “Then how should we go about it? Do we need to look for a couple that more or less matches us and then copy them?”

“Nah, that would take way too much time,” rejected Bakugou right away, suddenly remembering he was still in the process of eating his lunch and stuffing a bit more of food in his mouth while he tried to come up with a good strategy. Smart as he was, it didn’t take him too long to reach a conclusion about that train of thought. “I guess it’s a matter of adapting. See? There’s that flexibility you wanted. Instead of changing the plan, we can just change ourselves as we follow through with it.”

“That doesn’t actually answer my question,” Todoroki pointed out, an eyebrow slightly arched. He was starting to get the feeling that Bakugou wasn’t giving him a straight answer on purpose, either because he didn’t like it or because he didn’t want to admit he had no clue about what they should do.

“Hmph, you’re just too dumb to get it,” scoffed Bakugou with a dismissive shrug. “If you do as told, everything will go according to plan.”

“Okay, then what should I do?” deadpanned Todoroki, curious to see if Bakugou would bite into that trap question or if he would deflect.

“How about you start annoying me less?” grumbled Bakugou, his gaze tightening back into a glare as he picked some more food with his chopsticks and shoved it into his mouth.

Deflection. Of course, sighed Todoroki to his own buttons. That could only mean that the second scenario - that Bakugou had no clue about what to do or even how to implement his 'acting skills improvement plan' - was the correct one. Maybe it was time he took matters into his own hands, leading them into a sensible direction rather than letting Bakugou aimlessly fumble around trying to see what stuck the best. "So, in other words, you think we should keep our plan as is, but improve our married couple image, just in case the villain group isn't buying our acting."

"Nn…" Bakugou grumbled yet again, too busy chewing to give a proper response.

"So, more hand-holding, even though you hate it when other people invade your personal space?" double-checked Todoroki, for the sake of his own physical integrity and safety. Bakugou was the type of rambunctious person who would literally hit someone if they got even a single strand of their hair within the borders of what he classified as 'personal space'. Funnily enough, Bakugou had no problems with desecrating his own personal space whenever it came to physically torturing those who crossed it.

"Ugh, do I really need to spell everything out with you?" groaned Bakugou while rolling his eyes at Todoroki's unnecessary question. He didn't even need to actually ask that question; he already knew that yes, he really did need to spell everything out whenever Todoroki was concerned. "Yeah, yeah, more hand-holding or whatever. Just make sure it doesn't get in the way when we're moving. I have no problem with publicly wiping the floor with your pretty little face if you make me trip and fall in front of other people again."

"Got it," acknowledged Todoroki with a small nod, once again ignoring completely the blatant threat. "Does that also mean I can kiss you in public, so long as I don't make you fall off a chair again?"

"Grrrrr…" Bakugou wholeheartedly did not want to dignify such a

stupid question with an answer, but, again, this was Todoroki he was dealing with. If he gave him any unsupervised leeway, he'd take the opportunity to lead them into uncharted territories. Those 'uncharted territories' usually revolved around public humiliation for him, and that was far worse than going along with this silly questionnaire. "So long as you don't make me fall off *anything*, AND don't make a habit out of it. You already know that overusing it will make it less effective, so save it for key moments."

"Okay. What else can we do…?" said Todoroki, wondering about what other 'tricks' they could use to officialise their 'newlywed' status. For some additional help and inspiration, he glanced at the TV and the airing romantic comedy show. "What about hugs?"

"So long as it doesn't get in the way whenever I'm doing something," sighed Bakugou, inwardly counting all the different ways he could strangle his 'husband' with a so-called 'hug'.

"And what about touching?" asked Todoroki, piggybacking on the hug question to expand to other types of physical contact that could not be classified as a hug or hand-holding.

"It depends," said Bakugou with a dismissive shrug. "Touch me the wrong way, and your hand is gonna get broken. Touch me in the wrong spot, and you might end up without that limb altogether."

"I'll keep that in mind," deadpanned Todoroki, taking a mental note about this set of threats. Maybe he should consider himself lucky that he still had all of his limbs intact after their little makeout session on the sofa at Endeavor's hero agency… Then again, it could also mean he hadn't touched Bakugou in the wrong way or spot. Given how contradictory Bakugou was, both could even be true at the same time. "Is there anything else you want to add to it?"

“Nope,” Bakugou quipped, nice and quick. “If you’re done with the questions and suggestions, just keep eating your lunch and then leave.”

“Since I’m already here, why don’t I help you pack your things?” suggested Todoroki as a sincere offer to be useful to Bakugou, despite having just been bluntly told to finish what he was doing and then get the hell out of there. But this was Todoroki. He either missed or disregarded it entirely in favour of his wants. He wasn’t doing it intentionally; this was simply how he was as a human being.

None of that made it any less annoying for Bakugou, though.

Feeling like he was about to burst a vein from how fast blood was rushing to his head, Bakugou got up from the dining table with the clattering sound of the chair scratching against the floor. He slapped his chopsticks on the table and started stomping towards the balcony.

“What are you doing?” asked Todoroki, a terrifying bad feeling already creeping into every single cell on his body. The closer Bakugou got to the balcony door, the worse that bad feeling got…

“Since it bothers you so much, I’m about to get rid of every single motherfucker downstairs,” Bakugou declared without a single drop of hesitation, his voice collected but also icy cold and as deadly as a freshly sharpened knife.

“Wait, that’s a really bad idea,” said Todoroki in an expressionless panic, already running towards Bakugou to stop him before he did something he’d regret later, once his bad mood had passed. He was already unlocking and opening the sliding door, but fortunately, Todoroki made it there on time to prevent him from stepping outside. “Alright, I get it, you don’t need my help packing. So why don’t you stop and think about this for just a little while longer? Because once

they see you in this balcony rather than the one above, they'll add your apartment to the list of doorbells to be rung non-stop."

"You already constantly ring my doorbell, what difference does that make!?" hissed Bakugou, fighting hard against the arms wrapped around his waist as he kept trying to walk towards the half-open balcony door.

"Fine, I'll just knock from now on," sighed Todoroki, gladly offering the best compromise he could make at the moment.

"That's not the problem here!!!" roared Bakugou, momentarily forgetting about his goal of reaching his balcony and replacing all of his thoughts with the urge to maim and kill the dense trainwreck that he was legally married to. That provided Todoroki with a small opening, and he was able to pull Bakugou further away from the half-open door, his feet sliding and skidding against the floor. "Your constant visits are the problem!"

"Why? They have been a necessity as we plan out the mission. It's easier to talk in person than through text messages and phone calls, right?" Todoroki pointed out, his head quizzically cocked to the side even as he dragged muscle-clad Bakugou further and further away from that dangerous balcony. Once they were at a distance he deemed to be safer, Todoroki slackened his hold on Bakugou's waist, but didn't fully let go, fearing he'd break into a mad dash towards the balcony once again. "Besides, I like spending time with you. It's fun, and we do need to get used to it again, since we're about to live together full-time. Neither of us has had housemates for a good while. Starting now will make the process easier."

"……Don't think reasoning with me or sweet-talking me will make me change my mind…" said Bakugou with a pouty voice, the idea of scaring away the noisy crowd gathered in front of their apartment complex already fully out of his mind.

“You don’t need to change your mind. I just want you to think it through before you do anything,” Todoroki stated, inwardly heaving a sigh of relief at Bakugou’s toned-down 180. All he got in response was a moody ‘hmph’ and surly crossed arms. That made Todoroki sigh once again, this time with a tiny chuckle mixed in. *He still argues and pouts like a kid. I guess some things will never change, no matter how old he gets.*

It was challenging to keep track and deal with Bakugou’s tempestuous moods, snarky comebacks and petty antics, not to mention his inclination for picking violence as the solution and twisting everyone around his little finger depending on his present whim. But that was just how Bakugou was. There was nothing that Todoroki could do to change him, and neither did he want to. Bakugou forgave him on a daily basis whenever he was a bit too dense for his liking, Todoroki could do the same whenever Bakugou was, well, Bakugou.

“Hey,” called Bakugou, a pouty frown on his face as he remained completely immobile. When he noticed that he had gotten Todoroki’s attention back, he added, “How long are you gonna continue holding me for? Let go already!”

“.....” Todoroki thought about it for a while, much to Bakugou’s annoyance, and then changed the position of his arms, wrapping his hand around his wrist to make sure his hold wouldn’t be broken so easily. “No. This is a good training moment.”

“What ‘good training moment’!?” hissed Bakugou right away, placing down his crossed arms with a curt and indignant motion. It was a tight squeeze, but he managed to rotate his body only until he was nearly fully face-to-face with Todoroki. He was merciless as he pinched Todoroki’s cheeks and yanked them in opposite directions. “Are you trying to find out the hard way how much you can get away with? Well, let me tell you, no matter how patient and saintly I might be, I won’t tolerate any of that fuckin’ insolence! The only thing you’ll get out of it is abnormally saggy cheeks, at best, an early grave, at

worst!”

“W’y do yuu a’waysh go foh mah shiiks…?” deadpanned Todoroki, the movement of his distorted speech augmenting the painful sensation of having his cheeks pinched and stretched. He… Well, he hadn’t exactly lost count of how many times Bakugou had done this to him since they made that deal, but it had happened enough times that it got him slightly curious as to why this was Bakugou’s preferred low-impact retaliatory attack.

“Heh, isn’t it obvious?” snorted Bakugou, an evil smirk creeping into his lips. “I’m the only person in this world who would dare to attack your face. It’s as good as saying, ‘I can go after my own husband’s best attribute, don’t even try me, bitch.’ Besides, you look awfully pathetic like this. What’s there not to like about it?”

Bakugou looked pretty content and smug about his childish but effective punishment, even giving a couple of teasing tugs at Todoroki’s cheeks, already getting all reddish from the pinching. Usually, that same evil smirk made him come off as a total menace of a gremlin, but when it was accompanied by such immature actions… Let’s just say he didn’t look nearly as scary and mean.

“Anyway, enough playing around. Hurry up and let go,” said Bakugou, releasing both of Todoroki’s cheeks at the same time. He wanted to lower his arms, but he was forced to put them in this half-raised position, reminiscent of when someone was imitating a chicken flapping its wings, because of Todoroki’s arms and how he was holding his waist. Despite his urging, Todoroki didn’t move a single inch. Bakugou was about to yell at him some more when Todoroki suddenly let out a long sigh and lowered his head until his forehead was pressed against Bakugou’s shoulder.

“...Now I really feel like finding out how much I can get away with…” Todoroki mumbled under his breath, more to himself than to Bakugou, but still loud enough to be heard by both.

"'Sounds like someone still needs some more pinching and stret-" Irked by a comment he could only interpret as an impudent challenge, Bakugou readied himself to grab Todoroki's cheeks a second time and squeeze them until they bruised. But soon after he lifted his forehead from his shoulder, Todoroki immediately leaned forward once again - only that rather than landing on his shoulder, he landed on his lips for some brief seconds. It was now Bakugou's turn to have his cheeks flushed red, even though no pinching and tugging was involved. "You…!?"

"You were the one who suggested it. Don't complain now," pointed out Todoroki before Bakugou had the chance to argue back. He knew he'd still try to, though, so he preemptively sealed his mouth once again with a longer kiss.

Yeah, I'm so gonna kill this guy once this is over…! Bakugou snarled in the back of his mind, sadly unable to do it with his actual vocal cords. He grabbed onto Todoroki's arms as his tongue invited itself into his mouth with the confidence only a dense idiot could muster. Had they not agreed on this beforehand, he would have either bitten his tongue clean off or snapped every single bone in his lower arms into tiny, little pieces. Or maybe he'd…

Bakugou soon got too breathless to continue with his rage-fueled inner rant, even though there shouldn't have been any connection between his thoughts and his breathing rhythm. He merely lost track of the things he was thinking, far too consumed by that seemingly never-ending kiss. When it did end, though, Bakugou greedily took a big gasp, the air tasting cold against his heated face.

"Forget divorce… I'm gonna kill you and claim all of your possessions as mine…" Bakugou rasped in a hurry, trying to get his words out before Todoroki closed the short distance between their lips once again. "Then I'll burn every single item right in front of your grave…"

“That sounds like a nice plan,” chuckled Todoroki, unable to take such an amusing threat all that seriously. If that was the worst thing his ‘husband’ could come up with, then it wouldn’t be that bad to go through with that rather than the planned divorce. But, as was to be expected, his bland response only aggravated Bakugou even further.

Todoroki already knew that bickering back and forth and kissing were acceptable within Bakugou’s terms. They had done both plenty of times already. Because of that, repeating them wasn’t a good way to test limits and boundaries. An escalation of that was in need, but they had already also done all of the hand-holding, kissing and hugging that had been agreed upon. That only truly left touching as the final step, even if it came with those veiled threats.

I don’t know what Bakugou considers to be the ‘wrong way’ or ‘wrong spot’, so I’ll start with the areas I’ve already cleared as safe, Todoroki methodically concluded in the back of his mind, releasing his wrist so he could have both hands available. Then, he went for it, no uncertainty or hesitation affecting his actions.

“H-Hey, watch your hands…!” yelped Bakugou, his entire body stiffening when two warm hands sneaked inside his t-shirt and touched his lower back.

“I can’t see them from this position,” pointed out Todoroki in all honesty. Whichever direction he looked, Bakugou was pretty much all he could see. Since his hands were behind Bakugou’s back, it was quite obvious he’d be unable to see them until either of them moved, and that was definitely not happening any time soon.

“Do you really have to be like this every single time!?” Bakugou hissed, his teeth gnawing and grinding against one another. Never mind watching TV shows, he should force Todoroki to read some more books to see if he could finally teach his dense brain the concept of figures of speech and how to read between the lines! “You know what? Just shut up! Stop talking! Not even a single word more out of

your damned mouth!”

To see his words honoured, Bakugou tugged at Todoroki’s arms and pulled him closer while, at the same time, he craned his head forward. He couldn’t speak while kissing, but the same also went for Todoroki. Not hearing him butcher human communication with his inability to process it correctly would go a long way in helping him get out of this sticky situation, even if some sacrifices and concessions needed to be made.

But, in the end, all he got was a repeat of what had happened earlier that morning, when they were both at the support waiting area of the conference room. The ongoing kiss only motivated Todoroki to keep his hands exactly where they were, pressed flush against Bakugou’s smooth back. His ‘bad habit’ of getting a bit too excited mid-kiss even made a third appearance.

Even though they were already so close, Todoroki kept leaning his upper body forward, pushing Bakugou backwards as a consequence. Seeing as they were standing, it created this slow, clumsy, aimless walk whenever Bakugou was forced to compensate for the awkwardly positioned force clashing against him. That eventually led them to bump against the edge of the dining table they had abandoned. It also spelt the end of how far they could move while kissing.

“Ngh! Stop groping around my back…!” protested Bakugou, forced to pull his head back and rip his lips apart from Todoroki’s when his hands slid upwards towards the middle of his back.

“I thought this was a safe area?” pointed out Todoroki, alluding to having no problems or receiving any complaints when he had previously touched him there.

“I-It tickles, alright…!?” hissed Bakugou, his frowning expression

gaining a sulky glint.

“Don’t people usually laugh when they’re tickled, though?” said Todoroki while exemplifying precisely what he meant. When his right hand moved higher until he was touching the hard bone of Bakugou’s shoulder blade, he heard no laughs or giggles. Instead, Bakugou’s body trembled in tandem with the movements of his hand, and his jaw tensed into silence. That was a pretty abnormal reaction to being tickled, as far as Todoroki’s knowledge on the matter went.

“Uhh…” Todoroki’s earnest conjecture only made the pinkish hue dusting Bakugou’s cheekbones even darker. He didn’t even have a comeback for it since he was kind of right… probably. ‘Ticklish’ was the only word he knew that could describe that sensation, so that was the word he used. Whether it was the right one or not was not his problem, and he wasn’t about to let Todoroki make it into one.

“Is this why you’re so ruthless about your personal space?” asked Todoroki, this time moving his hand downwards. The pads of his fingers followed along his slightly arched spine until he returned to the small of his back, each movement eliciting more fidgeting from Bakugou.

“Do you wanna die?” Bakugou barked back, his crimson eyes tightening into a glare.

“Sorry, that was a mean question,” admitted Todoroki, backing off instantly. He was in a really good position to get attacked point-blank, and he did not want to find out which one of his moves Bakugou would use against him. As an apology and a token of his goodwill, Todoroki withdrew his hands from inside his t-shirt and replaced the lost physical contact with one more kiss.

He might be in the middle of testing boundaries, but Todoroki didn’t

necessarily want to do anything that Bakugou didn't feel comfortable with, even if he was too proud to admit it. So back to the basics he went. But just because he had addressed it as 'the basics', it didn't mean that kissing Bakugou wasn't a pretty great experience in its own right. His recently gained experience with it had allowed him to learn how to make the best out of it, which included and took into account both of their preferences and likes. It was a really weird phenomenon, but making Bakugou squirm around felt even more satisfying than what he got out of the kiss personally. That was why he still couldn't control this urge he felt to kiss him again and again once they started. To sum it up in just a handful of words, it felt too good to stop.

With that said, they couldn't exactly spend the rest of the day making out. Even if they were technically on vacation, their schedules were packed thanks to their unofficial mission. He might not like it or want it, but Todoroki had to summon the strength and will to stop. It wasn't easy, especially when he put enough distance between their faces to really take in the entirety of Bakugou's blushing features, but he somehow managed to do it…

…for about less than a minute.

"...Just for the record, I told you to watch it, not that you had to stop completely…" mumbled Bakugou after taking a couple of deeper breaths to even out the accelerated inflating and deflating of his ribcage. He didn't want Todoroki to get any silly ideas in his head or misinterpret his words, so he took it upon himself to clarify what he had truly meant earlier, even though it was ridiculously embarrassing to have to spell it all out that bluntly.

"Okay, that was my bad," were the words Todoroki chanted in the back of his mind, too busy pouncing on Bakugou to physically enunciate them. The resulting impact got Bakugou's hips bumping against the dining table once again, causing it to noisily slide against the floor behind them.

“Mmmh! Haa, wai- Mmngh…!” Bakugou’s voice was greedily swallowed by the nth kiss of the day, this one just as intense as the latter ones during the sofa fiasco. It was most likely done on reflex, but when he motioned his hand towards Todoroki to grab him, their positions were reversed, and it was his wrist instead that was grappled against the dining table, his upper body soon following along. At the rate things were going, Bakugou would collect enough furniture pieces in which he had been pinned down by Todoroki to furnish an entire hypothetical house before the end of the year.

His arm was being held motionless, and his head and back were pressed against the dining table by Todoroki’s body, but Bakugou still had a free arm he could use at will. It was promptly used to grab onto the back of Todoroki’s t-shirt when that ballsy moron took hold of his thigh and moved it aside to more snuggly insert himself between his legs.

Well, at least this time we won’t get interrupted, was Todoroki’s only takeaway from this whole ordeal. They were in the privacy of Bakugou’s apartment, where he could kiss and pounce on him without inconveniencing anyone. That little piece of information only stoked the out-of-control fires harder. Todoroki wanted to continue kissing him until they were both out of oxygen, but he also wanted to pick up where he had left off with the touching, despite his hands already being occupied with holding Bakugou in place. He found a way out of that conundrum when an idea one step short of genius popped into his head.

“Haa, haa, nnngh…” Bakugou thought he had finally gotten some breathing room when Todoroki pulled their faces apart after one final wet smooch, but he was forced right back into defence when Todoroki’s lips were replaced by the same tongue that had been so passionately tasting the inside of his mouth. The sensation of Todoroki licking him from his gasping lips to his clenched jaw sent shivers down his spine. It was fairly dangerous to allow his jaw to relax enough to speak, but he still had to make that risky gamble. “T-This is no longer just touching…”

“I’m just using different body parts to touch you. It’s probably fine,” pointed out Todoroki with a calmness that contrasted drastically with his rash actions. That sort of reasoning made total sense in his brain, especially when he was too busy with Bakugou’s body to pay full attention to what he was saying. Bakugou wasn’t as instantly sold on it, though.

“Oh, so now you’re suddenly an expert in semantics, huh?” grumbled Bakugou, his flushed face furrowing just the slightest with a pout. He wanted to lift his head from the table, but the way Todoroki was working his way down his neck left it feeling as heavy as lead. Even fidgeting and flailing around was hard with how tightly he was stuck between Todoroki and the table. The most he could do was yank at Todoroki’s clothes more and more the longer this went on. “Ngh, w-wait… Todoroki, ah-”

The sound of a door suddenly being slammed open echoed across the entire apartment, muffling Bakugou’s voice almost completely in the process. Both of them froze instantly, taking far longer than usual to react to a potentially dangerous unknown entity. They simply tilted their heads so they could peek at the corridor that connected the living room area with the entrance as a frantic voice grew closer and closer to them.

“Bakugou, I know you’re angry, but it was just an accident! He’s clumsy like that, but doesn’t mean any harm by it, believe me! So I’m begging you, don’t kill or beat up Todoroki because of what happened during the press conference!!” cried out the surprise intruder as he sped through the corridor with thumping footsteps. The intruder turned out to be Kirishima, sweat dripping down his panicked face as his bare feet skidded on the floor and he came to a stop by the living room entrance. The scene he walked in on nearly made him drop his jaw to the floor, but he managed to catch it halfway there to gasp, “Oh no… I’m too late… You’re already trying to kill each other…”

Seriously?, deadpanned Todoroki in the back of his mind, feeling surprisingly annoyed as he expressionlessly stared back at the flabbergasted Kirishima. Well, there went that ‘at least we can’t be

interrupted here' theory of his…

Chapter 19

“So? What the heck are you doing here?” asked Bakugou, a deep frown on his face as he stared straight at his friend’s guilty face. This went without saying, but it looked like Kirishima was already repenting, even though Bakugou’s lengthy sermon was only getting started. “Shouldn’t you be, you know, doing your fuckin’ job at who knows where in Osaka?”

“Well…” started Kirishima with a certain hesitation. His body uncomfortably shifted as he remained kneeling on the floor right in front of Bakugou, who was casually sitting on the sofa looking like the king of the castle - which, in a way, was the truth. “Today’s actually my day off… Thanks to that, I got to watch your press conference live, since I was kinda curious about how that would go. Aaaaand that’s when that, um, kiss and fall happened… I knew right away I had to do something or you’d murder Todoroki the moment you two were out of Endeavor’s hero agency. And I was right! You two were literally just brawling like you used to during training sessions at UA!”

“We weren’t-”

“You shut up and keep washing the dishes!” Bakugou intervened, cutting off Todoroki before he could complete whatever sentence that might have been. He had a long track record of saying the bluntest things ever without thinking about consequences, and that was the sort of thing Bakugou really wanted to avoid right now.

Kirishima seemed to be misunderstanding what had actually been happening a few minutes ago, probably because he only saw Todoroki pinning Bakugou against the dining table rather than kissing him. As far as Bakugou was concerned, they were all better off that way.

“.....” Todoroki expressionlessly stared at Bakugou in total silence

for a while. No, to be more precise, there was some expression on his handsome face - displeasure. In his own way, Todoroki was sulking at how his leisurely lunchtime with Bakugou had cascaded into a messy friend reunion. The sulking was particularly visible in the way he let out a small sigh, turned his head forward and kept on silently washing the dishes in the kitchen sink, the sound of passive-aggressive clicks and clanks echoing around him.

“Anyway!” scoffed Bakugou, enunciating every syllable of the word in a clear, loud manner. His strict gaze returned to his friend, who immediately flinched into a straighter kneeling position. “How did you even get in here?”

“Oh, I used the keys you gave me in case something happens to you,” explained Kirishima, hoping his earnestness and lack of ill intentions would soften whatever punishment was about to come his way. “I’ve never been here before, so it took me a while to track down the fastest route from the train station to the address you gave me ages ago. Fortunately, that crowd downstairs was a dead giveaway about which apartment complex you live in, ahahaha!”

“Right, I did do that…” mumbled Bakugou, searching through his memories for that particular hazy instance. It had been such a long time ago that he had completely forgotten he had provided Kirishima with a copy of his house keys, which were strictly to be used only in the case of an emergency, like, for example, if Bakugou was severely injured or, worst-case scenario, killed in action. All pro heroes had such ‘what if’ plans laid out, just in case. He could have chosen to give those copies to his parents instead, but he didn’t want to burden them with the task of sorting out his stuff right after losing their only son. That’s why Bakugou gave them to Kirishima instead, fully aware he probably would never have a reason to use them. Now, he was sort of regretting having made that choice. “Give them to me. I need to return them together with my own copies once I vacate this apartment.”

“Sure,” said Kirishima, all smiles as he searched for the set of keys in his pocket. When he finally grabbed and then motioned them towards

his buddy, Bakugou pretty much slapped them out of his grasp.

“Now, care to tell me which part of this can be called an ‘emergency’?” asked Bakugou, his voice nearly growling as it dropped a pitch or two and turned deadly cold. “Did someone ask for help? Were any signals of distress somehow sent to you? And no, Kaminari and Sero complaining that I'm not picking up their dumb calls is not a freaking emergency!”

“Ugh…” groaned Kirishima, readily closing his mouth now that Bakugou had destroyed the precise argument he was about to give to defend his actions. He nervously looked around Bakugou’s apartment, doing his best to come up with something that would save him from a gruesome death. “Err… You sounded pretty angry in the group chat?”

“I always sound angry in the group chat because I’m surrounded by fucking morons!!!” hissed Bakugou, his already demonic glare tightening even further as he smacked the top of Kirishima’s head with his open hand. “What part of this mission can you not understand, huh!? We’re pretending to be married! No, actually, we are married! So why the hell are you freaking out about a kiss or two!?”

“Of course I’m going to freak out if you’re the one getting kissed live on television! You gave us zero warning you’d do something like that!” pointed out Kirishima, absolutely gobsmacked that Bakugou was even wondering why they were making such a fuss about the events of the press conference. He sought some support from Todoroki, who was now done with the dishes and was walking up to them, but by the expressionless look on his face, Kirishima could already tell he wouldn’t be getting any help out of that front either. “I know you two are just pretending when you’re out in public, but look at it from our perspective, yeah? How would you react if I suddenly kissed Sero or Kaminari or the like in the middle of a press conference?”

“I wouldn’t give a rat’s ass about it,” scoffed Bakugou with a dismissive roll of his eyes. “It’s none of my business who you kiss, much less if it’s because of a mission. Do you think actors and actresses get all finicky every time they need to kiss a coworker while filming? It’s work. You just do it and then move on with your life.”

“Yeah, but you’re not actors, you’re pro heroes…” said Kirishima, starting to feel this really intense urge to smack his forehead against the floor. He knew very well how stubborn Bakugou could be once he made up his mind about something, but this seemed to be too big an overreaction to be considered normal ‘Bakugou behaviour’.

“It’s okay, Kirishima. We discussed it beforehand, while we were planning what to say during the press conference,” reassured Todoroki, even providing his former classmate with an expressionless thumbs up when he looked his way once again. “We’ve mutually agreed that it’s a handy manoeuvre to convince other people we’re really in a relationship. We’re also only doing it as a last resort. So you have nothing to worry about regarding consent and possible deadly consequences.”

‘Only doing it as a last resort,’ my ass… I’ve already lost count of how many times we kissed today, and we’ve only now reached the afternoon, grumbled Bakugou in the back of his mind, his eyebrow twitching from irritation. While Todoroki was technically telling the truth and they had only used kisses as a last resort up until now, that was only because he was simply counting the public kisses. If they were to include the ‘practice’ kisses too, Todoroki would automatically become the biggest liar and hypocrite in the country.

“Eh…? You agreed on it?” Kirishima repeated, his jaw ready to drop on the floor for the third time that day. “As in, you agreed that kissing was fair game for your mission…?”

“Like I’ve been saying this whole time, we need to make it believable,” sighed Bakugou, feeling yet again like a broken record

forced to repeat the same lines again and again and again. “I’m sure there are plenty of people out there who are suspicious of our sudden marriage announcement and wondering why exactly we’ve supposedly been keeping our relationship a secret this whole time. So we’re using our reputation, or better yet, our lack of a reputation in the romance department, in our favour. It seems pretty legit and convincing when it’s us kissing, right?”

“I mean, sure… You two definitely aren’t known for constantly hooking up with new partners…” acknowledged Kirishima, even though there was still a healthy dose of scepticism in his voice. “If anything, you’re on the total opposite end of that spectrum.”

“See?” proudly snorted Bakugou, a knowing smirk already tugging at the corner of his lips as he puffed out his chest. “We’re carefully laying out all of the groundwork so we can keep this whole scandal as pristine as possible and lower the probability of being caught in this lie. Once things calm down and the novelty of our ‘relationship’ dies down, we won’t have to put on such a big show and can go about our lives as usual until we complete our mission.”

“Well, if you’re okay with it, then I guess it’s fine…” said Kirishima, unable to continue questioning his friend on it when he sounded so certain about the plan they had created. “But if you’re willing to go that far, then why don’t you-”

Kirishima abruptly halted his next question halfway through.

Ever since their high school days, Kirishima had considered Bakugou to be his best friend. They had gone through a lot together, had supported one another during challenging times and had grown side by side into the pro heroes they were today. So if you asked him, he’d tell you he knew Bakugou pretty darn well.

If there was one thing that was cemented as Bakugou's baseline, it was his unwillingness to do anything that he did not want to do. Bakugou only ever did what he wanted or what he thought was best, no matter who he had to challenge or defy in the process. Even that 'best' had to fall within the grounds of what he considered to be in alignment with his inherent will, or else he'd come up with an even better 'best'.

In other words, if Bakugou was willing to kiss Todoroki for the sake of a mission, then it meant he wasn't opposed to doing it in itself, whether work was involved or otherwise. Kirishima was sure that if he asked Bakugou if he'd also kiss any of their former classmates or current coworkers if it helped him with the successful completion of a mission, the answer would always be a definite no.

He wasn't as close with Todoroki as he was with Bakugou, but Kirishima had the feeling he also felt the same way about it. Todoroki's lack of interest in love and romance, despite being so popular in that regard, was something the former Class A had been joking about since their first year in high school. There was no need for him to pretend to be in a relationship with someone when he had so many people more than willing to become his real lover. However, instead of one of those suitors, Todoroki ended up picking the least expected person as his partner for this so-called 'mission'.

Kirishima had yet to understand what sort of rational process had led Todoroki to make such an unforeseen choice, but what mattered most was that he had made it and showed no signs of regretting it.

Both Bakugou and Todoroki were such complex and different human beings, and yet they had simultaneously reached the exact same conclusion.

"Then why don't you just date for real?" - That was the question Kirishima had nearly asked them. He didn't follow through with it only because he didn't feel like it was his place to voice out such a thing, let alone influence them into adding such a possibility to their

considerations when they had yet to reach it themselves.

In fact, Kirishima had only travelled all the way there from Osaka because he was under the assumption that Todoroki had one-sidedly kissed Bakugou, something that would have absolutely ended in a bloodbath had that actually been the case. The last thing he wanted was for Bakugou to truly end up on the villain side after being charged for the murder of a fellow pro hero, so of course he boarded the earliest flight and train he could get and then ran at full speed all the way to Bakugou's apartment to prevent the inevitable from unfolding.

But now that he knew both Todoroki *and* Bakugou were on the same page, he had no more urgent worries to speak of. Or better yet, he did have some worries, in particular how long it would take them to realise they didn't necessarily need to fake it to make this relationship happen, but that would be a story for another day.

"Wait, if you two agreed on the kiss thing beforehand, what exactly were you fighting about then?" asked Kirishima, that question suddenly popping up in his mind when he realised there was no longer a proper reason that explained why they were brawling on top of the dining table when he got there.

"We weren't fighting, we-"

"It's obviously because he's such a nightmare to deal with!" Bakugou loudly hissed, slapping his whole hand against Todoroki's face to shut him up yet again. He then proceeded to pinch the cheek closest to him as hard as he could, silently passing on the message that Todoroki would be killed instantly if he opened his mouth. "This man-child came to beg me to hide in here while he's eating his lunch because those annoyances outside won't stop ringing his doorbell. Then he had the gall to tell me he'd help *me* pack my stuff. How exactly did you expect me not to throw hands instantly?"

“Ahaha… Now I see…” awkwardly laughed Kirishima, sending Todoroki and his poor, squished cheek a pitying glance. Interfering with the independence Bakugou was so proud of was indeed a sure-fire way of picking a physical altercation with him… “Still, I had no idea you lived so close to one another. Where’s your apartment, Todoroki?”

“Upstairs,” deadpanned Todoroki, gesturing at the ceiling with his index finger.

“Upstairs!?” yelped Kirishima, his eyes nearly popping out of their sockets, such was the shock of receiving that extremely unexpected piece of information. “You’re literally neighbours? Like when we were at the dorm!? How come I’ve never heard anything about it!?”

“I hadn’t either until we got married,” said Todoroki, reassuring their former classmate that he hadn’t been the only one left out of the loop.

“Bakugou, dude… You really need to work on your social skills…” sighed Kirishima, slowly shaking his head in disapproval. They all knew Bakugou was living on his own in an apartment somewhere, but no amount of pestering (mostly from Kaminari) had ever led to them being invited over. While Kirishima had had his address and keys for pretty much three years now, he had never dared to show up there uninvited until now. Still, nothing was stopping Bakugou from mentioning, ‘Hey, Todoroki just moved into the same apartment complex as me, what a coincidence,’ aside from his own stubbornness…

“Yeah, right! If I told you guys, you would have definitely invited yourselves over to his apartment and then just ‘accidentally’ knocked on the wrong door!” Bakugou yapped back in retaliation. “I know very well how you guys are and how your dumb brains work, so don’t even try to deny it!”

“Ugh… Yeah, that sounds like something Kaminari would do…” groaned Kirishima, his head slumping backwards at the same time he leaned back a bit more, his hands on the floor to prevent him from fully falling down.

“You idiots might not realise it, because I’m so patient and saintly and you guys routinely share the same single brain cell and take turns on who’s currently using it, but you love to stomp my boundaries. Of course I’m going to make my life easier and not share certain information with you,” scoffed Bakugou, a bit calmer now that he had effectively hit Kirishima where it hurt the most - Kaminari’s stupid, unsuccessful and absolutely annoying prank schemes. “I don’t even want to think about how many phone calls and messages I’d receive if I had included, ‘Btw we’re gonna kiss a few times, don’t mind us’ in the guidelines I’ve sent you. It would be just as bad as those professional stalkers outside! I can only tolerate so much at the same time, so I decided to pick the least troublesome battle first. But worry not, Kirishima, I will absolutely deal with you guys once we stop being followed 24/7 by that horde of salivating vultures. It will be a lesson you will never forget for the rest of your miserable lives.”

“Aha… Ahahaha… I, um… I think I should get going…” stammered Kirishima with a nervous laugh, already picking himself up from the floor in preparation to get the hell out of there before Bakugou gave him the advanced experience of whatever it was that he was planning to ‘teach’ them. “I have work tomorrow, so, you know… I shouldn’t get back to Osaka too late and all that… Gotta get my daily 8 hours of sleep, ahaha…”

“Yeah, that sounds like a great plan,” acknowledged Bakugou, suspiciously keeping Kirishima continuously under his gaze while remaining in his seat on the sofa.

“Do you want me to drive you to the train station?” offered Todoroki, the third person greatly in favour of that plan. Not to sound rude, but he and Bakugou did sort of have a schedule to meet - a schedule that

was now twice as delayed due to Kirishima's unexpected visit. The sooner he left, the faster they could get back on track. Plus, if Todoroki personally dropped him off at the train station, he'd be making sure their surprise visitor had truly left. "We're borrowing one of my agency's vehicles while we're on vacation."

"Nah, that's not needed. You must be super busy with the last-minute house move. I don't want to inconvenience you any more than I already did. I appreciate the sentiment, though," said Kirishima, declining that offer right away with a big smile on his face. "Oh, there's no need to see me off, I know where the door is. If you guys need any help with your mission or dealing with the reporters and so on, let me know!"

"Just make sure you don't say something stupid if you're ever interviewed about us, that's all the help we *want*," sighed Bakugou while rolling his eyes at the energetic way in which Kirishima was waving at them as he walked towards the living room's entrance.

"Sir, yes, sir!" acknowledged Kirishima with a quick, half-serious, half-joking salute.

"And make sure Dunce Face also doesn't say or do anything stupid, alright?" added Bakugou a bit more loudly, wanting to make sure that Kirishima heard him as he disappeared from sight. He got a quick thumbs up in return, Kirishima's hand the only visible part of his body.

Yeah, it's too late for that already, deadpanned Todoroki in the back of his mind, recalling the 'wedding gift' he had received from Kaminari that past weekend. Given everything that had just been said, Bakugou was definitely not going to be all that happy once he found out about that. Todoroki's only hope was that said discovery happened further down the line than right now at the beginning. *Well, what Bakugou doesn't know won't hurt anyone, especially not Kaminari. But that's beside the point. There's something a whole lot more important that needs to be*

addressed right now…

“What?” said Bakugou, an eyebrow getting quizzically arched when he noticed Todoroki expressionlessly staring in his direction shortly after they heard his front door opening and closing.

“You said no one knows where you live,” said Todoroki, his face once again gaining that sulking expressionless demeanour he had on while washing the dishes.

“You literally heard Kirishima say this was his first time here, right?” groaned Bakugou with a fed-up roll of his eyes. “Who cares if I said that no one knows where I live or that no one has ever been invited to my apartment? The most important thing is that no one has been disturbing my peace up until now.”

“But he had your address and a copy of your keys,” pointed out Todoroki, relentless with both his words and his gaze. This time, he wasn’t going to allow Bakugou to dismiss this conversation with his usual tactic of minimising his actions and words.

“So? I bet you also gave a copy to your family and have created your own version of the directives I made in case something happens to me,” Bakugou remarked while shrugging his shoulders. The moment he saw Todoroki opening his mouth, he knew right away what he was about to say, so he beat him to it. “No, I definitely couldn’t give the keys to my parents instead. My old hag would constantly drop by at random moments and take charge of the whole place. 18 years of living under her roof were enough, thank you very much. Kirishima might be a big doofus at times, but he’s dependable for stuff like this.”

“Does that mean you’re also going to give him a copy of the keys to our new apartment?” grumbled Todoroki, feeling more and more bitter about this unplanned issue. He thought that their new

apartment would be just his and Bakugou's, a place meant for just the two of them while they were dealing with their respective problems. The thought of Kirishima also having free access to it whenever he felt like it was disrupting that perception to an aggravating degree…

"Huh? You're gonna be there too, so why would I do that?" declared Bakugou almost instantly. He truly could not understand what exactly Todoroki was trying to get at with all of those useless questions. As far as he was concerned, there was no connection between the apartment they were going to move into together and what he had been doing while living on his own. It was like comparing apples to oranges, just pure nonsense. "Besides, we are literally married, you dumbass. *You* are my most direct next of kin now. So if something were to happen to me, you're in charge of dealing with it."

"Oh." And just like that, all of that bitterness and irritation was expelled from Todoroki's body and mind. Even he was slightly taken aback by how that simple explanation had radically changed his entire mood and demeanour in the span of seconds. It left him absentmindedly staring at Bakugou in total silence, slowly processing the whiplash of the clashing emotions. After a good while, he finally said, "So there won't be a third copy of the keys?"

"If you want to give one to your family, go right ahead," said Bakugou, using one more dismissive shrug to nestle his back more snuggly against the sofa. "Just make sure it doesn't somehow end up in Endeavor's hands. He would be just as bad with unannounced visits as my old hag. Nah, it would be even worse, since he's someone who definitely can't find out the truth about our marriage. If he goes there, he'll notice right away we aren't living like an actual married couple."

"My parents don't exactly have your stereotypical marriage, so I'm not so sure about that," deadpanned Todoroki, forced to come back to Earth from la-la-land with the mention of his father. Due to their Quirk marriage and the events that unfolded shortly after he was born, Todoroki didn't have many memories of his parents living together as a married couple. He was far too young when his mother's mental breakdown happened, which was then followed by an absence

that lasted for nearly a decade. Now that the Todoroki family was splintered into the optimal distance for everyone, there was little to no chance that his parents would ever live together as a through-and-through couple once again, even if they were still legally married to one another.

"Yeah, but he has this thing called 'common sense'," scoffed Bakugou, lightly shaking his head in disapproval of Todoroki's naivety. "He's already all paranoid about our very-much-real marriage certificate, seeing the apartment we'll be sharing as simply housemates would feed that paranoia even more. And yeah, we can try to prevent him from going there, but who are we trying to kid here? He's definitely going to come up with some excuse to go there at some point."

"Yeah, he most likely will," sighed Todoroki, his shoulders slumping just the slightest. He could already see his father weaponising their shared workplace as a way to come 'inspect' his new living quarters. "What should we do about that? It will be impossible to fake something like that at the last minute if he shows up at our doorstep out of the blue."

"Getting him out of there before he can figure out the truth is our best bet," Bakugou admitted, even though he didn't like how half-assed and fallible such a plan was.

"Yeah…" Todoroki also wasn't a big fan of that plan, but what other choice did they have? They only needed to pretend to be a real couple while out in public, and their private residence was meant to give them a break from that while keeping their deal a secret from the rest of the world. It would be impossible for them to reverse that course just so they could handle some sporadic, temporary incidents. Unless… "Do you wanna share a bed?"

"……Did the dish soap somehow travel all the way to your brain and wipe away the last few brain cells you had?" asked Bakugou, so scandalised by that absurd suggestion that he even forgot to get mad.

“How the heck do you even fit two grown men in the same bed? Mine is big enough for me, but that’s about it. There’s no way cramming two people in a space meant for one is comfortable or sustainable. And just for the record, I ain’t about to sacrifice my sleep quality just because your stubborn old man might or might not show up for a surprise ‘marriage investigation’.”

“Wanna go buy a bigger one, then?” Todoroki suggested next, his sitting position straightening up out of enthusiasm. If Bakugou’s only problem with his plan was space and comfort, then there was a very easy fix for it - they just had to buy a new bed that they could claim to be marital property. “We have that extra bedroom, so we can keep whichever bed we’re replacing there until our mission is completed. Actually, we can just use that room as storage for the furniture we have extras of. You have a sofa, I have a sofa, but we only need one for the new living room, right?”

“Hmm… That’s not a bad idea, but…” mumbled Bakugou, giving that suggestion a second thought now that Todoroki had expanded it in a workable, convenient direction. It still had a fair amount of rough edges, though, so he wasn’t willing to accept it just yet. “How would we even decide what gets used and what gets stored away? That plan just sounds like something that would get us arguing back and forth over who gets to use their stuff without actually getting anything done.”

“In that case, we can just decide with a game of rock, paper, scissors,” said Todoroki, his voice and demeanour dead serious as that awfully childish solution exited his mouth. “Whoever wins gets to use that piece of furniture. The one who loses stores it away in the extra room or finds a different use for it somewhere else. Easy, right?”

“.....Pfft! Ahahaha!” Contrary to Todoroki’s very-much-serious expectations, Bakugou burst into laughter instead of providing him with a yes or no. “Doing justice to your name, are we now, you half-assed idiot? Rock, paper, scissors to decide on furniture, he says… You couldn’t have come up with a weirder solution if you tried, ahahaha!”

“You were the one who said you wanted to think things through and make everything fair in the apartment we’ll be sharing…” pointed out Todoroki, his heart doing what he could only describe as a somersault before settling into a faster rhythm. Getting Bakugou to laugh and smile twice in the same day was unprecedented, a miracle as rare as winning the lottery ten weeks in a row. Instead of sulking at the fact that his genuine suggestion was getting laughed at, Todoroki felt twice as determined to implement that fairness system for their shared home. “If our disputes and differences in opinion are solved by a game of chance, we can’t get angry at one another for losing, right? I think such a simple solution would fit us pretty well…”

“You do know I could easily cheat my way into always winning at rock, paper, scissors, right?” snickered Bakugou, the corners of his lips mischievously curling into a smirk.

“Yeah, and I could do the same, which means our interference would cancel each other out,” said Todoroki with a quick shrug.

“You really think so, don’t you?” scoffed Bakugou, his smirk widening even further. Whether Todoroki was overestimating himself or underestimating Bakugou was of no importance; what mattered most was that his ‘husband’ was under the impression they would be on equal ground. “Fine, we can use that method to plan the layout of the apartment. I’m gonna go grab something where we can write down my winning streak.”

Hehehe, he has no idea what he just signed himself up for, mischievously giggled Bakugou in the back of his mind as he got up from the sofa to go find himself some writing tools. *I’m about to dominate that entire apartment after getting it delivered to me on a silver platter, hehehe…*

Spoiler alert: the lengthy game of rock, paper, scissors that was about to unfold did, in fact, not go according to Bakugou’s evil

machinations.

Chapter 20

Damn it, something's not right here…

The tension in the living room could be cut with a knife, so thick it had gotten in the past 30 minutes. Bakugou's glaring eyes tightened as he closely observed the current results of the lengthy rock, paper, scissors 'competition' they had started to solve any potential disagreements about furniture and the layout of their future shared apartment.

There were quite a few things they were both willing to compromise on, like in the kitchen's case. Todoroki was fully aware he wouldn't be giving it all that much use daily. Hence, he was more than happy to give Bakugou full control over what happened to it. He could change it and arrange it whichever way he liked, and Todoroki wouldn't say a peep about it. All he wanted was a little corner in the cupboards, fridge and freezer for his food. That wasn't an unreasonable demand, so Bakugou readily accepted those terms.

Todoroki was also in agreement with how Bakugou wanted to repurpose their big balcony for training purposes above all else. It was fine as it was right now, so there was hardly anything to discuss about it, but once the rainy season and the cold of winter arrived, they'd revisit the topic and figure out a way to continue training outdoors regardless of the atmospheric conditions.

That only left the common areas, such as the living room, the entrance and the extra room, and the marital bed, which was when things started getting serious - perhaps a bit too serious.

Bakugou's initial winning streak quickly morphed into a tit-for-tat warfare, until they found themselves in the current 50/50 split. After the first couple of rounds that went in his favour - because he was

doing exactly what he said he would do and was cheating his way into a perfect victory - Todoroki suddenly started winning the rock, paper, scissors matches until he was tied with Bakugou. From there onward, they constantly took turns on who won and who lost.

With that sort of weirdly fair equity and the escalating tension in the room, Bakugou could only reach one conclusion - Todoroki was likewise cheating, just like he said he could.

Shit, we're slipping back to old habits without even meaning to…, Bakugou grumbled in the back of his mind, his jaw tensing as he realised what was happening.

He was a very competitive person, someone who hated to lose with a violent passion, and, most importantly of all, he was an irredeemable perfectionist who wanted to claim absolute victories in all facets of his life. In simpler terms, Bakugou refused to lose against anyone, even during a silly game of rock, paper, scissors.

However, Todoroki was very similar to him in this regard. He was also a naturally competitive young man and would take any challenge that came his way very seriously. He probably wasn't going all out at the start of their 'competition', but the constant losses must have started to rub him the wrong way halfway through it, and so he switched to competitive mode. In other words, he was now taking these matches seriously and was actively trying his best to win against Bakugou.

This explosive competitiveness that was being fed by their cut-throat personalities and unyielding pride was what got them in countless tense matches since their very first meeting. Whether it was training matches, test scores, official matches in UA's sports festival, or even the number of villains and criminals they arrested during internships, Bakugou and Todoroki always unconsciously turned it into their own private competition against one another. The fact that they were evenly matched in nearly everything they competed over had turned them into each other's biggest rival.

After graduating from UA, they began working in their respective hero agencies, first as sidekicks and then as full-fledged pro heroes. That temporarily cut down on the number of opportunities they had to start these childish competitions against one another. They were far too busy to keep that going, all the more so with the reduced number of interactions they had during and outside their work hours.

But now that they had taken on this 'mission' and were actively working together - to not speak of the fact they would be literally living under the same roof from now on -, they didn't waste any time returning to their private competitions over every little thing.

Such an annoying outcome felt like a really bitter pill to swallow, but Bakugou had to admit that turning their decision-making into a fair match was indeed the most fitting solution for them. Making it clear who had won or lost over a specific disagreement saved them a lot of time that would have been otherwise spent arguing back and forth. Sure, it was a bit weird and even extremely childish to decide something according to a silly game of rock, paper, scissors, but its effectiveness was undeniable.

That's why Bakugou couldn't really complain about what he had been writing down on that notepad, even though he was so very annoyed at the 50/50 split. According to it, they would be blending their possessions so equitably that it nearly felt like they were truly merging their past single lives into a strong partnership that transcended the piece of paper officially dubbing them as a married couple. It wasn't even the oftentimes mismatched furniture or having to keep a portion of his belongings stored in the extra room that was bothering him; it was the silent symbolism such a perfect blend represented.

"Tsk, let's end this once and for all…" grumbled Bakugou under his breath, moving on to the last match of the day - the so-called marital bed. *I'm pretty happy with my bed as it is, so I guess I'll let him win this one… It's his father who is the potential problem here; it's only fair that he's the one making changes to fight that threat.*

Todoroki gave a silent nod with his head at that mumbled instruction, already preparing his hands for the final game of rock, paper, scissors. His naturally expressionless face was unreadable, but so were Bakugou's frowning features. The silent gap between that announcement and the start of the 'match' seemed to stretch on and on.

The tension reached its peak as they simultaneously moved their closed fists, once, twice, thrice, before revealing their last 'attack'. One used 'rock', the other 'scissors'.

With that, Todoroki was awarded the final victory, much like Bakugou had calculated.

Losing one more time pissed him off more than he could express with words, but it was for the greater good of their mission. If he could swallow the humiliation of being pushed from a chair mid-kiss while live on television and other news outlets, he could do the same about a bed he wouldn't even be using unless one of their 'enemies' decided to pay them an unannounced visit and refused to leave until he had concrete proof to support his 'conspiracy theory'.

"Well, now that everything has been decided, let's go," said Todoroki after an acknowledging nod of his head. He got up from the sofa while adjusting the position of his smartphone in his pocket. With that, he noticed a few missing items. "Ah. I need to pass by my apartment before we leave. I left my wallet and the car keys there."

"Huh? Let's go where?" asked Bakugou, caught completely off guard by that sudden change of plans. "Weren't we supposed to continue packing our stuff?"

“While I might be used to sleeping on a futon, I don’t necessarily want to sleep on the floor,” deadpanned Todoroki, stopping on his tracks as he was halfway to the corridor connecting the living room area to the entrance. “If I don’t buy the bigger bed now, we won’t be able to time the delivery with our current move-in date.”

“Yeah, but what does that have to do with me? Just order a bed online or something,” pointed out Bakugou with a dismissive shrug. “There’s no reason why I need to go to a physical store with you.”

“It’s way too hard to decide on the right mattress if I buy it online,” explained Todoroki, quickly checking the time on his phone. They still have a good handful of hours until most stores close. That meant they could take their time, even if they got surrounded by the journalists and paparazzi still keeping guard outside. “Plus, there’s a big chance you’ll also have to sleep in it. Didn’t you just tell me you didn’t want to be uncomfortable or sacrifice your sleep quality?”

“Tsk…” Once again, Bakugou’s previous words were coming back to bite him in the ass. There really seemed to be no way out of this one, especially with how weirdly insistent Todoroki was being. “Fine. I could use some more boxes for the packing, so I might as well grab them on our way there.”

“Oh. I should buy some too, now that I think about it,” acknowledged Todoroki, having finally realised that he didn’t actually have the basic items needed to safely move his belongings from one apartment to the other. He waited for Bakugou to grab his things and then walked alongside him to the entrance area. “ I should also get some packing tape.”

“Get something to cushion the most fragile objects too while you’re at it, or else you’ll open the boxes to broken stuff left and right,” warned Bakugou while rolling his eyes at Todoroki’s easy-going attitude. He was starting to get the feeling that a certain someone was about to half-ass his moving, and then a certain phenomenal genius would

have to come to his rescue during every single step of the process. *I might as well save myself the trouble of fixing problems and just micromanage the whole thing from the start…*

"Oh yeah, I didn't think of that," gasped Todoroki, once again mindblown by Bakugou's foresight. "Should we also rent a moving truck to help us transport both the big and small stuff? There's no way we'd be able to fit the bigger pieces of furniture inside my agency's vehicle."

"I'm already working on it," sighed Bakugou, his smartphone already in his hand even as he locked his door. He had already been thinking about renting a proper moving truck for the day of the move, so he had already done his homework and researched a few possible candidates for that role. "Since it's your fault we have that mob setting camp in front of the apartment complex, you're in charge of moving them somewhere else as we carry our stuff to the truck."

"So you're still keeping the blame game going…" mumbled Todoroki, sighing to himself in the back of his mind. He had already lost count of how many times that little incident had been weaponised against him, even though not even a full day had gone by since the press conference.

"I told you I won't let you live that one down," scoffed Bakugou, pressing the call button right next to the elevator. Fortunately, the elevator was already on that floor, so they boarded it right away. The elevator trip was over in a matter of seconds, as their first stop was Todoroki's apartment, one floor away from Bakugou's. "If I'm going to be haunted by the video recordings of that press conference for the rest of my life, I'm going to make sure you get some consequences of equal proportion."

"Your pettiness truly knows no bounds," deadpanned Todoroki, his face growing even more expressionless as he reached for his keys. While there was more he could say in complaint, he was aware that

there was no use in doing so.

Bakugou was as vindictive as a bloodthirsty lion; he would hunt down the same victim again and again until his hunger for vengeance was finally sated. Seeing as he was still holding the results of their first sports festival at AU against him, Bakugou would probably use the kiss and fall incident against Todoroki for the rest of their lives, much like he said. But, at the end of the day, that was just how Bakugou was, and Todoroki had long accepted it as something he just had to deal with to the best of his ability. Besides, if Bakugou was truly angry at him and bothered by what had happened, he would simply cut off Todoroki from his life rather than weaponise the incident against him. As such, Todoroki was still in the clear as far as Bakugou was concerned.

“Do you want to come in for a little bit?” asked Todoroki, gesturing to the inside of his apartment with his thumb after unlocking and opening the front door.

“Just hurry up and go get your things,” groaned Bakugou with an exasperated roll of his eyes. He urged Todoroki to get moving by shooing him away with his hand, all ready to wait right there in the hallway as he organised the moving truck matter. However, unexpectedly, the hand that was meant to get Todoroki to focus on his current task ended up getting caught up in following along. As Todoroki stepped inside his apartment, he dragged Bakugou inside with him and then closed the door behind them.

“Now you’ll be able to see I know how to look after my living space,” explained Todoroki, calmly taking his shoes off with just one hand despite the begrudging glare being sent his way.

“You are so freakin’ annoying…!” Bakugou barked in retaliation, not taking such underhanded tactics all that nicely. It was okay when he was the one tricking other people into doing what he wanted; it was *not* okay when someone tried to force him into participating in

something he had already refused. If Todoroki had already thought of him as petty and stubborn, then Bakugou was about to prove to him how truly petty and stubborn he could be when in a pissy mood. “You have five seconds to get your stuff, or else I’m gonna make you regret having forced me to come inside. You don’t wanna lose your precious security deposit, do you? Then get-”

“I’m willing to take the risk,” Todoroki had no problem with cutting off Bakugou at the same time he leisurely reached out to him and picked him up like he would a little kid. Since he mostly grabbed him by tightly securing his legs against his torso with his arms, with Bakugou’s upper body hanging over his shoulder like a piece of clothing in a drying rack, Todoroki had disabled the use of his legs and feet to nearly zero. He couldn’t do much about his arms and hands, though…

“Argh, why are you always like this!? Are you making fun of me or something!?” roared and raged Bakugou, getting smoothly transported deeper into Todoroki’s apartment despite all of his complaints. “Don’t get too ahead of yourself just because you’re just a tiny little bit taller than me, you asshole! There are some deadly consequences to anyone who dares to demean me like this! You’re about to find out why I’m always getting headhunted by villains!”

“I wouldn’t have to go through all of this trouble if you’d just cooperate with simple requests,” sighed Todoroki, calmly walking up to his kitchen counter, where he had left the car keys and wallet. Even with all of Bakugou’s thrashing and raging about, he managed to hold his legs in place with just one arm while he used his other hand to grab his things and put them in his pockets.

“I also wouldn’t have to come up with all of these threats if you’d just take my ‘no’ as an answer!” hissed Bakugou, shoving his elbow right in the middle of Todoroki’s back. That had a bit of an impact, since Todoroki staggered a bit, but only because his sharp rebuke had been so effective against him.

“No, but I was just……” After one tired sigh, Todoroki promptly turned around and returned to the entrance area, where he carefully put Bakugou down in the exact same spot where he had picked him up. “I’m sorry, I won’t do that again…”

“Hmph!” That haughty scoff was the only thing Bakugou said, accompanied by him turning his head to the side, rather than continuing to glare at Todoroki’s expressionless sad puppy face. The usual silence between the two of them returned, only that this time it was the uncomfortable type. Bakugou wasn’t even being the unreasonable one here (or at the very least, he didn’t think he was), and yet he was being made to feel like the bad guy by Todoroki’s stupid expressionless mug. The piling up of frustration was too much for him to deal with. He didn’t have to think twice before he kicked Todoroki in the shin - a real kick, not just a light tap. “That’s the cost of picking me up like a fuckin’ kid! Don’t think our apartment is the only thing I’m going to enforce a fairness clause on! Understood!?”

“Okay,” said Todoroki, his whole demeanour lighting up instantly - even though it wasn’t all that visible due to his unmovable, stone-like facial muscles. As he put his shoes back on, he mumbled to himself, *Arguments are solved with rock, paper, scissors, picking up costs a kick, and doing something that annoys him means I get my cheeks pinched and stretched… I think those are all the rules I need to remember? Yeah, this will be easy.* “Let’s go?”

“…Hmph…” Bakugou ended up resorting to one more moody scoff as his reply. This goodie-two-shoes side of Todoroki had always rubbed him the wrong way, but it also sounded stupid to complain about it when he was obediently doing as told and trying to work things out with Bakugou. On the other hand, continuing to bicker with him was a total waste of time, so it was preferable when Todoroki was this quick at folding.

“I know you’re not in the best of moods today, but try to hold back a bit until we reach our car, okay?” requested Todoroki as soon as they boarded the elevator a second time, this time with the ground floor as their goal. “They might be annoying, but those reporters are just doing

their job. For the most part, I guess…"

"I know that. You think I haven't been dealing with them for years now?" grumbled Bakugou, his brows slightly creased with a frown. "Besides, they will get tired of it soon enough. No matter how thirsty they are for exclusive news and sticking their noses where they aren't concerned, they are total weaklings. Most won't last more than 24 hours without good results."

"So you think they'll start giving up on going after us and will switch to easier targets?" asked Todoroki, interpreting Bakugou's words according to his personal experience on this topic. Yes, the journalists and reporters usually were fast at giving up after a few hours of no concrete results. The paparazzi, on the other hand, could relentlessly pursue whatever scoop they were after for weeks on end. They also didn't shy away from jumping to conclusions without properly doing some research on it, hence Todoroki's previous false scandals.

"Yeah, most of those pests have no patience or endurance. Today is the worst day," said Bakugou with a quick shrug of his shoulders. "Of course, there are a couple of things we can do to make that process faster, hehehe."

"…Who are you going to throw under the bus this time?" sighed Todoroki, already guessing what was about to come just by seeing the evil glint in Bakugou's crimson eyes. At the very least, he knew he wasn't going to be the sacrificial victim this time, as they needed to stick together to get their shopping done.

"I'm about to give a whole new meaning to 'killing two birds with one stone'," announced Bakugou, the evil glint finally reaching his lips with one awfully villainous smirk. "Nah, make that several birds with one stone. You can stop bitching at me about my bad mood, cuz I'm about to vent at least half of my frustration and get in a real good mood."

“.....” For his own safety, Todoroki deemed that now was a good time for him to shut up and let Bakugou run wild. He’d only interfere if he thought that Bakugou was about to go too far, but since he seemed to be moving according to a proper plan, he probably could just sit back and watch the terrifying show.

The elevator trip ended just like that, with Todoroki acting as a silent spectator while Bakugou concluded the warm-up phase. Once they reached the entrance hallway of the ground floor, the first thing their eyes gravitated towards was the crowd right in front of the front door. There were fewer people there compared to when they first passed by while in their car, but there were still enough of them to be a total nuisance.

“Let’s get these brainless morons out of the way,” snickered Bakugou, heading straight towards that troublesome ‘battlefield’. The moment he opened the front door, his ears were assaulted by a cacophony of questions and the clicking sounds of cameras flashing. It was nothing out of the ordinary for those working in the pro hero field for a few years now. The first thing out of his mouth made a few of them back away a couple of steps. “You’re in the way. Do your damn jobs in a way that doesn’t inconvenience the rest of us trying to go about our day as usual.”

“Would you be willing to answer a few questions?” asked a gutsy reporter who wasn’t intimidated by Bakugou’s ‘go away, leave me alone’ aura. “Everyone is dying to hear a bit more about your relationship!”

“I already said I would only answer questions during the press conference, didn’t I?” said Bakugou, his glaring eyes immediately pinpointing the idiot who dared to speak first. The frown on his face slowly changed into a knowing smirk, the intensity of which made a couple of reporters gulp down the hard lump forming in their claustrophobic throats. “I’ve fulfilled my weekly quota of humouring the masses, but aren’t there plenty of other people you can go after? If

you rush now, you'll be able to catch Endeavor just as he's leaving his hero agency. Since he wasn't a part of the press conference due to some… personal disagreements, I'm sure he won't say no to using his free time in the afternoon to answer a couple of your questions. Then again, you already know how he is. Better hurry up, or you'll miss your small chance to hear the great takes of the father of the groom."

…*I'm so glad I'm married to him instead of being his enemy,* Todoroki deadpanned to his own buttons, not all that surprised at how expertly his 'husband' managed to screw over his father. With just a couple of sentences, he got a few reporters and paparazzi to detach from the crowd and run as fast as possible to their vehicles. Needless to say, they were doing exactly as told and rushing to Endeavor's hero agency at full speed, hopeful to get that scoop before anyone else.

"Ah, but if you think Endeavor is too big and mean for you to deal with, why don't you try… Hmm, Chargebolt or Cellophane, for example?" suggested Bakugou, doing his best to keep an evil cackle from escaping his vocal cords. "They've been a great help these past few years in keeping our relationship a secret at our request. I'm sure they'll be more than happy to talk about it now that we've come out in the open. Oh, and don't forget to pester Deku, too. Ask him about his plans for the future. I'd hate it if I were to hoard all of your attention when he and Uravity would be an even better source of news, since they've been publicly dating right from the start. Their wedding would be a whole lot more interesting than ours, don't you think?"

…*Yeah, we probably should avoid turning on the TV for the rest of the week,* sighed Todoroki in the back of his mind, silently observing as the crowd once again split into several groups, losing more than a third of its initial size in the process. Bakugou had truly come up with a way to use up all of the pawns he had at his disposal in the most convenient but sadistic way possible. He had never thought that the mass media could be weaponised against someone like this, but of course such a tactic was just a regular occurrence whenever Bakugou was in a petty, vengeful mood. *Still, he was telling Kirishima to keep Kaminari under control, but now he's telling the reporters and paparazzi to go interview him? Isn't that pretty counterproductive?*

Since Todoroki wasn't quite sure what exactly Bakugou was trying to accomplish by involving their former classmates in this petty payback, he simply observed their conversation from right next to him. It was easy to keep things under control when Bakugou was the only one talking, but it was clear that pretty much every single reporter and paparazzi wanted to bombard them with question after question. How would he get rid of the remaining ⅔ of the crowd? Todoroki could barely wait to find out.

"I know you said you kept it a secret because it's none of anyone's business, but is that really the truth?" asked a paparazzi with a bold, loud voice shortly after Bakugou was done dragging a few more of their acquaintances into the conversation (which Todoroki could only guess where the people who had been participating in the group chat's discussion). "I wouldn't say you're the type of person who keeps a part of himself hidden away for this long. I mean, it must be super inconvenient to secretly date someone when you're constantly getting followed by us, right?"

"Heck yeah, you guys are inconvenient as hell," snorted Bakugou, facing the obnoxiously straightforward man head-on. He took a half-step to the side, until his body was bumping against Todoroki's. "But neither of us is very fond of sharing, you see? Our time together is for us and us only. Which is why you guys are seriously starting to piss me off with all of this crap. Don't you have better stuff to do with your time? I guess all of you must be a bunch of jealous, desperate virgins, if you're that interested in bothering a newlywed couple during their honeymoon instead of going out on dates yourselves or spending time with your partner. How sad…"

"Bakugou, we need to go, or we won't be able to take our time selecting the right bed," said Todoroki, grabbing Bakugou's hand and lightly tugging it to catch his attention. This was the right time for him to intervene and end this one-sided word massacre, or else Bakugou would gain a few more enemies in the press world.

“Are you gonna continue following us, or are you starting to get sick of us rubbing our relationship on your lonely faces?” asked Bakugou, throwing one last smirk at the speechless crowd before he started walking away together with Todoroki. While some would definitely raise the white flag and go look for a news article on this scandal somewhere else, Bakugou was sure there were still some stubborn ‘professional stalkers’ who would continue following them around. That was more than fine, so long as they kept their distance and didn’t bother them too much. Once they were at a considerable distance from the bustling crowd, the smirk on his lips immediately turned into a frown. “Ugh, I’m so sick of them. Dealing with those annoyances is truly the worst part of our job…”

“Only because you’re so antagonistic toward them,” chuckled Todoroki, adjusting his hold to his fake husband’s hand so they could more comfortably walk side-by-side. “If you treated them a bit more nicely, I’m sure the more stubborn ones wouldn’t feel like making following you around and finding all of your ‘dark secrets’ their life mission.”

“I can’t fake sympathy like you goodie-two-shoes do,” snorted Bakugou with a dismissive roll of his eyes. “I’m gonna give it to them straight, whether they like it or not. I mean, it’s their fault for being the nuisance that they are. The few who know how to behave and don’t get in the way are the ones I show the bare minimum of respect for and actually talk with when needed. Everyone else can fuck off for all I care.”

“Yeah, that’s exactly why,” said Todoroki, the shadow of a smile surfacing on his lips. It was exactly this straightforward attitude that refused to mince words or be kind for the sake of being kind that made Bakugou the perfect ‘partner-in-crime’. No one else fit the role of his fake spouse. Todoroki wouldn’t accept or even entertain the thought of being with someone else like this. It had to be Bakugou, that he was sure of. Todoroki was extremely thankful that Bakugou had accepted his proposal for this ‘mission’, so he would try his best to make it the kind of perfect success that his partner always aimed for. “By the way, are you sure it’s okay to send them Kaminari’s and everyone else’s way? Weren’t you worried about them accidentally

saying the wrong thing?"

"Yeah, which is why I'm going to give them a little helping hand with it," Bakugou declared, already grabbing his smartphone with his free hand. He smoothly unlocked the screen, opened the group chat app and quickly typed a message with just one hand. He then turned the screen to Todoroki, a devilish smirk on his face. "This should be good enough of a 'lesson', don't you think?"

"....." Once Todoroki read the message Bakugou had sent to their group chat, a shudder crawled up his spine. His heterochromatic eyes quickly returned to the haughty look of satisfaction on Bakugou's face, not a single drop of hesitation or leniency in sight. "You're frightening…"

"I'll take that as a compliment," chuckled Bakugou, locking the smartphone's screen and putting it back in his pocket.

"I'm so lucky I'm the one who married you. I wouldn't want to be in their shoes…" sighed Todoroki, sending a few silent prayers to their former classmates. If Bakugou was truly a god, like that villain group said he is, then the world was doomed to fall into chaos or rise into a utopia according to the ever-changing whims of this man alone.

"Yeah, yeah. Keep those compliments coming. It won't score you any brownie points, but at least it will feed my current good mood," snorted Bakugou, gladly accepting Todoroki's expressionless voice as a tribute being offered to his good name.

"I'm just telling it as it is," said Todoroki, squeezing Bakugou's hand a bit more tightly. "I really am grateful that you accepted my proposal, even though this is such a crazy plan. Thank you, Bakugou. If I do something wrong, feel free to also give it to me straight. I'm not used to being married, so I'm sure I'll make some mistakes now and then.

Despite that, I hope you can forgive me like you did just now and continue working together with me right until the end."

"H-Hmph, as if I'm used to it either…" grumbled Bakugou, promptly turning his head in the opposite direction.

"I guess we'll just have to learn as we go," chuckled Todoroki, that same soft smile back for round number two. He really felt like giving a little pinch to Bakugou's bright red earlobes, but he would behave himself while they were out in public and make sure to keep his hands to himself, or else they'd end up swarmed by overenthusiastic reporters and paparazzi once again.

Chapter 21

Thanks to the pro hero-grade car they were temporarily borrowing, Bakugou and Todoroki arrived at a well-known furniture store without further issues.

They were careful on their way there, but they also didn't try too hard not to be followed. Bakugou's clever scheming had shooed away the majority of the reporters and paparazzi keeping guard outside their apartment complex; only a few still felt like continuing to pursue their next news article by directly chasing after the couple in question. Most of the crowd simply went after easier targets, with a particular interest in all of those people who had been mentioned by Bakugou himself.

Those who were still tailing them were probably the most cut-throat paparazzi who got even more annoyed and vengeful after getting called 'lonely virgins' straight to their faces, but that was a-okay for the two of them. They were just going to buy a new bed and stock up on moving supplies. What could go wrong with that?

"Do you have any requests or preferences for the bed?" asked Todoroki as he locked the car, neatly parked in the adjacent multi-floor parking lot owned by the furniture store. They began walking towards the footbridge that connected the parking lot with the main store building, surrounded by other customers who were far too absorbed with their shopping to take notice of the 'couple' going viral.

"Not really, it's not like I'll be using it much," said Bakugou with a dismissive shrug. "Just make sure it's big enough for two adult men. I won't think twice about pushing you off the bed if it gets too cramped. Intrude on my personal space and I'll even do it while I'm sleeping."

"Yeah, I'm fully aware of your bad sleeping posture," deadpanned Todoroki, their high school days flashing through his mind. Whenever

class A was forced to share a room during field trips, training camps or internships, those sleeping in the futons next to Bakugou always ended up getting punched or kicked a handful of times throughout the night. Fortunately, Bakugou was completely conked out, so they were far lighter than his usual fearsome punches and kicks. On the other hand, it was disruptive enough that they secretly created a rotation system, in an attempt not to drive anyone into sleep deprivation hell. Todoroki had no idea how aware Bakugou had been of that secret agreement, but he probably had an inkling of it, given how smart he was.

"And yet, sharing a bed as a last resort is still the best solution," scoffed Bakugou, his brows creasing just a little bit. "Tsk, I should have tried harder to convince those annoyances to go after Endeavor… Maybe that would force him to finally admit we're really married."

"My father is too stubborn for that," sighed Todoroki, likewise getting a more serious expression on his usually expressionless face - the customary bodily reaction whenever his father's negative personality traits were discussed. "He might be closer than ever to cracking, but that doesn't mean it won't take a long time for him to give up on those 'conspiracy theories' of his."

"He might be retired now, but he's still a veteran," Bakugou pointed out, both of them taking their sweet time crossing the footbridge. No instructions were planned in advance, but they still ended up doing a quick surveillance sweep around their surroundings, promptly pinpointing a few individuals who had also been in front of their apartment complex. They took note of every one of them while they leisurely continued with their conversation. "He probably can smell the bullshit from a mile away, even if he can't exactly figure out what it is."

"Which is why you want us to improve our acting skills… right?" asked Todoroki, despite already knowing the answer to that question. The automatic glass door slid open for them just as Bakugou was giving him a silent 'obviously' side eye. They knew the faces and

locations of every single ‘enemy’ around them; it was time they used said ‘enemies’ to further their ‘mission’ and remotely deliver one more blow to Todoroki’s side of the deal. He offered his hand to his ‘husband’ and waited for his okay. “Should we go through the display area first?”

“It’s more convenient that way, even if it’s a waste of time,” sighed Bakugou, feeling a bit grumpy as he took Todoroki’s hand. Under normal circumstances, he’d go straight to one of the employees and ask them for their recommendation for whatever it was he wanted to buy. They knew their inventory and products way better than the customers did, so their opinion could reduce the time spent at the furniture store by half if they picked the right person for the job. However, they did have to put on a show and let the ‘professional stalkers’ take some good photos out of it, much to Bakugou’s annoyance. They had no choice but to pick the time-consuming option…

“I wouldn’t call it a waste of time,” said Todoroki, trying his best not to chuckle at Bakugou’s choice of words. “Isn’t this pretty much a shopping date?”

“A *fake* shopping date, but yeah, whatever,” grumbled Bakugou, rolling his eyes around to show how uninterested and unenthusiastic he was about that whole ordeal. “Let’s just make it quick so we don’t push back our schedule any more than we already did. All of these unplanned side quests are getting on my nerves…”

“Since it’s a fake date, do you want to stop by and eat something?” suggested Todoroki, pointing at the cosy restaurant area they were currently passing by. He found it weird that a furniture store also sold food, but maybe that was just par for the course in the country where the store originated from.

“Did you not hear what I just said!?” hissed Bakugou, his brows furrowing even further out of annoyance. He was already holding

Todoroki's hand, but that didn't stop him from using his free hand to also pinch his cheek and use that hold on him to pull him further away from the food court. "Stop getting sidetracked and focus on our actual plans! We're here for a bed, not fuckin' meatballs!"

"O'ay…" Todoroki ended up relenting, his voice coming out weird due to the cheek pinching and tugging, but he was far from disappointed by that outcome. He was too distracted by the fact that Bakugou had actually acknowledged the title he had given to this unplanned outing, which he had only done as a joke. However, if his fake husband was okay with calling it a fake date, then a fake date it was. Maybe that was why he had gotten too ahead of himself and tried to steer their outing into an entirely new direction a handful of seconds after this surprising development had been announced.

"Damn it, it's always like this with every single one of you… I'm more of a babysitter than anything else… You just wait, one of these days I'll seriously…" grumbled Bakugou under his breath, still pulling Todoroki along through their clasped hands despite having already let go of his cheek. His goal was the bedroom section, so that's where he took them, regardless of how many times Todoroki tried to stop to curiously look at this or that. The few complaints he grumbled out loud were warranted, but they didn't seem to bother his ditzy 'husband' in the slightest. "This is your bed. Why the heck am I the one leading the charge?"

"You take things too seriously, that's why," said Todoroki, his head slightly tilted as he looked at the dissatisfied frown on Bakugou's face. "We're technically on vacation right now. There's no need to rush, even if our schedule gets a bit disrupted."

"If I don't take it seriously, nothing will get done!" scoffed Bakugou, once again aggravated by Todoroki's laid-back response. "Plus, it's easy for you to say that when you weren't the one who created the schedule. How would you feel if you had to constantly postpone what you were planning to do or were already doing because other people keep getting in your way?"

“Well… Yeah, that I do agree with you,” acknowledged Todoroki, changing his stance on this matter after hearing that fitting argument. He certainly didn’t like it all that much when they were walked in by his father and sidekicks and then by Kirishima. Bakugou was most likely feeling a similar type of frustration after getting his plans walked all over again and again. “Okay, let’s focus on the bed only for now. I don’t care about style or size, I’m just picky with the mattress. I’ve spent my whole life sleeping on futons, so I haven’t adjusted to beds just yet.”

“Don’t you have a bed in your current apartment?” pointed out Bakugou, his voice and demeanour still looking a bit pouty.

“Yeah, but two years is nothing compared to eighteen years,” Todoroki explained with a quick shrug. “If I could, I’d still be sleeping on a futon. But it’s just not the same in a room without tatami mats. With a wooden floor, it has to be a bed, right?”

“Yeah, you’re picky, alright,” sighed Bakugou while rolling his eyes yet again. “If it bothers you that much, just do what you did at the dorm and change the room from Western style to Japanese style. You did it once, you can do it again.”

“A dorm room at UA is completely different from a bedroom in a regular apartment,” said Todoroki as he softly shook his head. “I had everything I needed there to make the change in less than a day. There’s no way I could repeat that now.”

“Sounds like a skill issue to me, but whatever floats your boat,” mocked Bakugou, his moody expression finally softening - though it was to change his facial expression to a knowing smirk. After much walking and just as much bickering, they finally reached the bedroom section of that ridiculously big furniture store. Bakugou gestured with his thumb to a display area lined up with dozens of mattresses, some

laid down on top of mock bed frames, others in a vertical position that resembled a domino formation. “My advice on it is find a mattress you like first, then pick a bed frame that fits it.”

“Yeah, that’s how I went about it the last time, too,” acknowledged Todoroki with a quick nod, already walking towards the displayed mattresses together with Bakugou.

“Wait, if that’s what you did already, couldn’t you have just bought the same mattress you currently have, but a size bigger?” Bakugou pointed out, forcing both of them to a stop. His crimson eyes promptly homed in on Todoroki, who was actively averting his gaze as a result.

“.....”

“I want a freakin’ refund. This husband model is clearly broken. Where’s that goddamned manager when we need one?” Bakugou hissed each word with a level of bitterness he didn’t think possible, always while venomously glaring at Todoroki. For the second time that day, he felt like Todoroki was messing with him just for the heck of it.

“I didn’t do it on purpose. It just slipped my mind,” explained Todoroki in an attempt to prove his innocence and lack of ill intentions. “And since we’re already here, we might as well keep going. Maybe I’ll find a mattress that’s even better than the one I have.”

“I’m gonna make you scrub so much tomorrow, your hands will be ground to dust!” snarled Bakugou right before he resumed his walk towards the mattress display. He wanted nothing more than to yank his hand out of Todoroki’s grasp as retaliation, but he couldn’t exactly do that while they were being shadowed by those annoyances. Their usual banter was already a potential downside; he really couldn’t

afford to jeopardise their mission any more than that. “You should consider yourself lucky that I’m so patient and saintly. Otherwise, you would be eating one of my explosions right about now!”

“I appreciate your self-restraint,” deadpanned Todoroki, even though he wholeheartedly felt relieved that Bakugou’s threats remained as just verbal words. He spoke from personal experience when he said he did not want to catch one of Bakugou’s explosions from point-blank range. They were in the middle of a humid, intolerably hot summer - his ‘husband’ was more than loaded for a blast or two, even without the support of his hero costume.

Bakugou kept on grumbling under his breath for a little while longer, but he calmed down shortly after they got to the mattress display and Todoroki attentively started browsing through the available products. Todoroki could more or less get the gist of them by reading the tags placed next to each displayed mattress, so he only tried out the ones that were along the same lines as his current one.

After patting and sitting on seven different products, Todoroki returned to the fifth one he had tried and sat on it once again.

“Yeah, I think this is the one,” announced Todoroki while he nodded his head in acknowledgement. “It’s close to the same level as some of the best futons out there.”

“Took you long enough to decide,” sighed Bakugou, part of him relieved he had actually found something he liked. He was starting to think they’d need to go to a different store if Todoroki couldn’t find the right fit for his picky sleeping preferences. He was about to call over one of the many store clerks in that area when his hand was suddenly yanked forward. “Wah!”

In the blink of an eye, Bakugou found himself half perched over the

sitting Todoroki, one of his hands still clasped with Bakugou's, while the other one was giving some additional support to his hips and preventing him from accidentally tumbling down in the wrong direction. His heartbeat rate immediately spiked into a faster rhythm, but it was surely out of surprise and nothing else.

"You should try it too," said Todoroki, scooching backwards to make some more room for Bakugou. "If it's also up to your standards, we'll go with it."

"T-The size is the only thing that matters to me," Bakugou mumbled in a rush, putting his hand on Todoroki's shoulder to push himself back to a proper standing position.

"But didn't you say you don't want to sacrifice your sleep quality?" pointed out Todoroki, tilting his head slightly as he stared straight at the flustered Bakugou. Before he could slip out of his grasp, Todoroki let go of his hand and circled his waist with both of his arms. He then proceeded to leisurely fall backwards onto the mattress without a care in the world, obviously taking Bakugou down with him.

"Wai-!" That sudden move got Bakugou yelping again, but the suddenness of it all made it impossible for him to react in a timely manner. He ended up half sprawled on top of Todoroki, half flailing in mid air. He could already feel his face heating up due to the ridiculousness of their current positions. "Are you out of your mind!?"

"So, what do you think?" asked Todoroki, ignoring all complaints exiting Bakugou's mouth. "Pretty comfortable, right?"

"How the hell am I supposed to know, when I'm not even touching the freaking mattress!?" hissed Bakugou, so very fed up with Todoroki's brainless ideas. He could not understand what part of this… *thing* would allow him to try out their possible future marital bed. If

anything, the only thing he was trying out right now was the idiot he was legally married to, much to his chagrin.

“Oh. Right.” Todoroki had to admit that Bakugou had a point there. He could tell he was currently supporting the entirety of his weight, the way he was being comfortably squished underneath him. However, there was a quick, easy fix to that. All Todoroki had to do was roll his back on the mattress until Bakugou was carefully plopped down on it. “What do you think now?”

“Grrr… Yeah, whatever. It’s good enough, I guess,” grumbled Bakugou with an extremely sour voice. Now that Todoroki had released him, he propped up his upper body from the mattress using his arms, his moody facial expression coming into full view of his mattress neighbour. “I’m gonna start charging you for each time you manhandle me! Maybe then you’ll learn what should and shouldn’t be done out in public!”

“What’s the price this time? A gut punch?” deadpanned Todoroki, already guessing where this was about to go. He knew Bakugou was more of a ‘barking dog who doesn’t bite’ when it came to enraged threats, but he also wasn’t one to forget any perceived disrespect.

“You asked for it, so don’t complain afterwards,” said Bakugou, his glaring eyes tightening a bit as he adjusted his laid down position and readied his fist. Just as he was about to strike Todoroki right in the middle of his abdomen, a phone started ringing. That took the wind out of his sails nearly instantly, and he withdrew his hand back to the mattress. “Tsk, save by your stupid phone…”

What is it this time?, Todoroki sighed in the back of his mind, feeling slightly irked at whoever was interrupting his fake shopping date with Bakugou, even though he was just about to be gut-punched. He was forced to arch his eyebrow a bit when he saw Midoriya’s name on the screen. “Hello?”

“T-T-T-Todoroki-kun, what exactly is happening!? Why am I getting swarmed by journalists and so on!? And at Kacchan’s request, from what they’re saying!!” Midoriya yelped right away, so panicked that he even forgot to start the conversation with the usual greeting. *“I didn’t even do anything! I wasn’t a part of that group chat conversation, why am I receiving the same treatment!?”*

“I mean… Bakugou never passes up the opportunity to bully you, so…” said Todoroki, not really sure what he was supposed to tell his friend. He hadn’t been paying much attention to their group chat, but he could easily tell who had been the instigators through each name Bakugou had given to the crowd in front of their apartment complex. If Midoriya had truly not been a part of the conversation, then there was only one reason why Bakugou had also added him to the list - he was simply taking out his frustration on his childhood friend, much like he had been doing their entire life. Since he was lying down right next to Bakugou, he heard him softly mumbling, ‘You can bet I ain’t missing any chance to twist that nerd around my little finger.’

“F-Fair enough…” groaned Midoriya, his voice sounding so very tired - though it was hard to tell if that exhaustion was caused by Bakugou’s bully antics or the barrage of questions he probably had to deal with. *“Still, it’s not fair of him to send the journalists our way right after saying, and I quote, ‘I sent a little test your way. If you’ve been reading the study materials I sent you, you should be able to pass it with flying colours. If you bomb the test, though, you just wait. I’ll give ‘divine retribution’ a whole new meaning. Good luck. Drop dead already, you brainless pests.’ Also, what did he tell them to get me bombarded with questions about my hypothetical future wedding!? Ochako-san and I haven’t even discussed that subject yet!”*

“Again, this is Bakugou you’re dealing with here… What else did you expect?” sighed Todoroki, part of him sympathising with his friend’s current struggles. It certainly wasn’t easy to deal with journalists and paparazzi when it came to such a delicate topic. If anything, Bakugou truly knew how to target someone’s weak spots and how to best capitalise on them to his benefit. “I’m sure he’ll cool down eventually.

Just give him some space and don't mess up the interviews."

"That's easier said than done…" nearly sobbed Midoriya, very much feeling like he was stuck between a rock and a hard place right now. *"This is only day one, and everyone is already going crazy with the sudden news. Even my hero agency keeps getting calls left and right about you and Kacchan. I think… you might have gone a bit too far with the, um, p-press conference thing…"*

"Yeah, we've reached that same conclusion already," deadpanned Todoroki, glancing at Bakugou just as he was repeating Midoriya's words with a mocking tone. He wasn't speaking with him on speaker phone, but they were close enough to each other that Bakugou could hear every single word coming from the other end of the phone call.

"All the photos and social media posts aren't helping much either…" sighed Midoriya, not all that surprised that Todoroki was taking all of that with so much composure and serenity. It was a reaction that wildly contrasted with Bakugou's, who used it as both a tool and a weapon to get the outcome he was going after. The one thing that surprised him, though, was the fact Todoroki was still alive after the stunt he had pulled during the press conference. His childhood friend wasn't exactly the type of person one could kiss at random, let alone do so while in front of that many watchful eyes... *"Shouldn't you stay away from the cameras for a while? At this point, it's going to interfere with our hero activities…"*

"Tsk!" Bakugou loudly clicked his tongue at that last line, his face going into demon king mode in less than a second. He yanked Todoroki's smartphone from his hand and pressed it against his ear. "Cry me a river, why don't you!? This is what you get for not minding your fuckin' business! Next time, think twice before you open your mouth! Also, give Uraraka our thanks for us! She did a great job while talking with Endeavor. If only all of you could be like her! Now piss off and stop bothering us! We're already dealing with enough stalkers as it is, we don't need one more!"

“K-Kacchan!? I-I wasn’t-” Before Midoriya could finish his flabbergasted squeaking, Bakugou ended the phone call and let the smartphone slip from his hand to the mattress.

“You’re always so nice to Uraraka, why can’t you be a bit more understanding with Midoriya?” asked Todoroki, lifting his upper body a bit from the mattress with the help of his arms. He then grabbed his phone and placed it back inside his pants’ pocket.

“Yeah, dream on,” scoffed Bakugou with a dismissive roll of his eyes. “If you’re done with that nerd and with the mattress search, let’s get the rest of our things and end this needless shopping outing once and for all.”

“Oh, before we do that,” interrupted Todoroki just as Bakugou, too, was beginning to sit up. He leaned to the side and downwards, his lips meeting with Bakugou’s for just a handful of seconds. Once he was satisfied with the duration of that quick peck, he parted their faces the bare minimum and whispered, “It’s been a while since I last did it. Since we’re pretty much surrounded, we might as well use it for our benefit.”

“...And then you complain about my evil plans…” grumbled Bakugou, his cheekbones inadvertently flushing a pinkish hue. Fortunately, he was quick at getting his body under control and easily slipped away from Todoroki by sliding his body out of the display mattress. Once he was back on his feet, he also returned to his usual scowling demeanour. “Are you also gonna try out every single bed frame that meets your fancy?”

“I don’t really care about the bed frame,” said Todoroki, promptly getting up and positioning himself right next to Bakugou as they moved on from the mattress display area back to the bedroom section. “If you have any suggestions, I’m all ears.”

“Like I keep telling you, it’s your bed, do whatever you want with it,” Bakugou sighed. “If you really want some recs that badly, just ask one of them.”

“You’re right, I should do that,” acknowledged Todoroki, his mismatched eyes following where Bakugou was pointing. There were a few staff members around that area who could inform them of what they needed. One of them, a man around the same age as them, wasn’t attending to any customers, so that’s who Todoroki decided to approach. “Excuse me.”

“Yes, what can I help- Holy shit, it’s you guys!!” Just as the man was turning around with his best customer service smile, he froze and then yelped at the sight of who he was dealing with right now - the pro hero newlywed couple that had broken the internet earlier that morning. He quickly composed himself and cleared his throat before beginning from the start. “Please excuse me. What can I help you with?”

“We want to buy a bed,” explained Todoroki, pointing towards the mattress they had been bickering on top of just a few minutes ago. “We already picked a mattress that suits both of us, but we can’t decide on a bed frame. Do you have any suggestions?”

“Of course, follow me,” said the man, all smiles as he urged the two of them to accompany him deeper into the bedroom section of the furniture store. “We have a few beds which would be able to withstand two pro heroes. Feel free to pick and choose according to your taste and budget.”

“Oh. Okay.” Todoroki glanced back at Bakugou, seeking his approval on that matter. Since he simply shrugged at it, Todoroki figured he deemed that to be acceptable, and they both followed the store clerk, confused as they might have been about his choice of words.

Only after a few more cheeky comments as several bed frames were introduced to them did they understand what the employee was insinuating. That moment was probably the first time Todoroki saw Bakugou's face go bright red for something other than boundless anger or their fake couple acts.

Chapter 22

“I am never, ever going shopping with you again!” Bakugou yelled out of the blue, his feet kicking around on the carpeted floor of their borrowed car.

“You’re still sulking about that?” sighed Todoroki, only sparing Bakugou a quick glance before he focused on the road in front of them once again.

“I’m gonna ‘sulk’ for as long as I want!” hissed Bakugou in retaliation. He had to do his very best to refrain himself from hitting the driver amidst all of that annoyance - he didn’t want to accidentally cause a car crash, after all. After clicking his tongue out of repressed anger, Bakugou continued grumbling under his breath. “Rather than give him a sale, I should have reported him to his superiors… The kid needs to learn to keep his stupid little comments to himself before he finds himself on the receiving end of a punch…”

That’s like the pot calling the kettle black, Todoroki added in the back of his mind, his lips curling just a little bit to shape an ephemeral chuckle. They had successfully bought everything on their last-minute shopping list, but, in the process, got Bakugou back in a bad mood due to the furniture store clerk’s joking comments. It didn’t bother Todoroki too much once he (belatedly) realised what was happening, but it had definitely rubbed Bakugou the wrong way, possibly because of how comically embarrassed he had gotten for only catching on so late. “He had a point, though.”

“Huh? He had a point about what?” asked Bakugou, his brows becoming even more furrowed and rugged as he turned his face back to Todoroki.

“About the bed,” said Todoroki, not going too deep into the remainder

of the explanation, as he had the feeling Bakugou had understood him loud and clear.

“You’re supposed to be smart. Why the heck are you going blank with human physiology?” Bakugou could only dismissively roll his eyes at Todoroki, unable as he was to punch or kick some sense into his brain. “Do you have any idea how much strength it takes to break a bed frame, especially a new one? Someone would pop their balls like a water balloon before the bed frame would start cracking or bending.”

“Thank you for such a terrifyingly graphic description,” deadpanned Todoroki, inwardly cringing at the words Bakugou had picked to destroy that myth. He was absolutely right, of course, but it was still a frightening image for a man to have in his mind. A change in topic was probably needed right about now. “Do you need to do anything else outside before we return to our apartment complex?”

“Nope, all I need is no more interruptions so I can pack my stuff in peace and quiet,” said Bakugou, placing his elbow on the door, right next to the window, before he leaned his head on his hand. “If you’re about to tell me you just remembered you also need to do this or get that, just drop me off somewhere and then go alone. I’m done interacting with people…”

“Home it is, then,” acknowledged Todoroki, his face becoming slightly more expressionless as he drove the car to the same parking lot they had picked earlier that day. Luckily, there were still some empty parking spots, so they paid their dues to last them until the following day and set off.

Since Bakugou had previously shooed away most reporters and only a handful of pesky paparazzi were still following them, they took the shortest route to their apartment complex this time around. In a matter of minutes, they were back at the entrance area of the building, the sidewalk looking a whole lot quieter and organised, now that it no longer had a crowd clogging it. The paparazzi obviously

took this opportunity to try getting more statements and comments out of the ‘newlywed couple’, but they were readily blocked by Bakugou’s menacing glare and Todoroki’s expressionless and quick refusal.

“Yeah, those guys are definitely going to set camp right there, until they get what they want,” grumbled Bakugou as he aggressively stabbed his index finger on the call button next to the elevator.

“Haven’t they gotten enough photos out of us already?” pointed out Todoroki, his head slightly tilted as he patiently waited for the elevator to arrive. “What more could they want?”

“My gut feeling is telling me it’s either my current address or the address we’ll be moving into,” said Bakugou, his gaze tightening even though he was simply staring at his reflection on the closed elevator door. “They probably think it’s pretty suspicious that I’ve been going in and out of your apartment complex all day long, even though they never saw me around whenever one of them was following you.”

“I mean, you did bait them into trying to find out our new address during the press conference, right?” noted Todoroki with a quick shrug. Once the door finally slid open, they both stepped inside, with Todoroki pressing the button to his floor right after Bakugou had done the same to his. It seemed they really were about to part ways and proceed with the packing separately…

“Of course I did, it was part of our plan. But that doesn’t mean I can’t get annoyed at it,” scoffed Bakugou. “And speaking of which, it’s time we pick it up where we left it off, alright? Enough wasting time with random stuff. We definitely won’t be able to finish packing today, so we’ll have to adjust tomorrow’s plans to get it all done on time. Which means, we need to start the cleaning as soon as possible.”

“At what time do you want us to go to the new apartment?” asked Todoroki, wanting to use the remaining seconds of the elevator trip they had left to the best of his ability.

“Around 8 would be good,” said Bakugou with a quick shrug. If he were doing it alone, he’d go far earlier than that, as he was an early sleeper and early riser whenever he had work to do. But with the way Todoroki was, 8 o’clock was a far safer bet.

“Okay,” acknowledged Todoroki, promptly grabbing his phone to make the needed adjustments to his alarm clock. “Do we eat breakfast before we go?”

“What, are you already trying to finesse some food out of me even though we aren’t living together yet?” snorted Bakugou, a knowing smirk worming its way into his lips. Once the elevator stopped and the door slid open, Bakugou leisurely stepped outside and then turned back around in the corridor. “You won’t be able to use the ‘they won’t stop ringing my doorbell and it’s annoying me’ excuse anymore, so good luck with that, Half-and-Half Bastard.”

“That wasn’t an excuse, it really was bothering me,” tried to explain Todoroki, but the elevator door closed before he could finish speaking. That was such a Bakugou way to end a conversation that Todoroki didn’t have it in him to travel back down to his floor and simply returned to his apartment while feeling beyond disappointed.

On the other hand, Todoroki could sympathise with Bakugou’s complaints. Their well-planned-out schedule had really been turned upside down the whole day. Their press conference ran shorter than they had agreed, but it had also been far more effective at creating a positive scandal than expected. The mix of the two caused a massive ripple effect that they were still experiencing in the form of constant stalking by reporters, journalists and paparazzi alike. Bakugou was the type of person who needed to be in control at all times, so seeing the plan and schedule he had created getting ruined was definitely not

sitting well with him.

"Well, at least my doorbell will get a break…" sighed Todoroki as he slowly walked to his apartment, key already in hand. Inside was the same silence of always, a stark contrast to the noisy cacophony of earlier that day. Without that source of disturbance, Todoroki truly had no way out of following Bakugou's plan, even though he would rather work together with him to finish their packing twice as fast. Then again, the faster they finished the moving process, the sooner they'd start living together. Ultimately, the goal was the same; the way to get there was the only difference.

With that in mind, Todoroki metaphorically rolled up his sleeves (he was wearing a t-shirt, mind you) and readied himself to get as much of the packing as he could done before dinner time. He only had a couple of hours until then, and as such, he needed to get down to work starting now.

He took the packing materials he had gotten together with Bakugou and placed them on top of the dining table. Todoroki had decided to start with the living room and kitchen area first, as those areas had some of the bulkier items. He also wanted to keep the furniture and appliances that would be stored away separate from the ones they'd be using to furnish the new apartment, and for that, he needed space.

Todoroki pushed both the sofa, the coffee table and the dining table back against the wall, freeing up all that space in the middle. Then he went to the kitchen area with two folded cardboard boxes in his hands. Since the kitchen was Bakugou's territory, all he had to do was store away all of his cooking stuff.

What do I do with the food, though?, wondered Todoroki in the back of his mind, head slightly tilted as he stared at the inside of one of his cupboards. He didn't cook that often, but he did have the usual staple ingredients, plus already-made food, whether store-bought or home-cooked by his mother and sister. It would be impossible for him to eat

and use everything before the moving date, even if he did share it with other people. *I guess I should eat what I can and then take the rest with me to our new apartment.*

His first thought after reaching that conclusion was to consult Bakugou about it. Surely, he wouldn't say no to keeping those things in their new kitchen, as they had agreed on Todoroki occupying a small portion of the storage space. But still, telling him beforehand what he would bring along to his territory seemed to be the most sensible thing… until he remembered that Bakugou didn't want to be bothered while he was packing.

"I'll just wait a little while longer," sighed Todoroki, his gaze dropping despondently to the locked screen of his smartphone. Just as he was about to place it on the kitchen counter, he noticed the notification light flickering on and off. "Ah. I've been ignoring all messages and notifications the entire day…"

As soon as he unlocked his smartphone, he was bombarded with several notifications and warnings, coming from several different apps and people. Some of them were from his siblings, who were asking him about how things had been going since he last spoke with Rei, their mother, that morning. The majority came from his former classmates, in particular from the group chat.

Opening that app and scrolling through the past few hours of messages partially explained why Bakugou had decided to punish some of them by sending all of those journalists and paparazzi their way. Former Class A was definitely having *a lot* of fun with their 'mission', that was for sure. The usual jokesters had been spamming the group chat with all sorts of screenshots and photos, and getting a good laugh out of them. Nothing that had been said was that bad, and they weren't making fun of them exactly either, but they were undoubtedly having the time of their life at their expense.

That reminds me, what is being said about us in the news and social

media?, wondered Todoroki in the back of his mind, leisurely walking to his sofa so he could have a comfortable time as he browsed through all of that.

It didn't take him long to find several news articles about the two of them, as well as several videos coming from all sorts of news channels. Nothing out of the ordinary was being said, just the usual relaying of factual information and a few surprised comments regarding how well they had been keeping their relationship a total secret. Several news reporters went over an analysis of the press conference, including several short clips of it, and that was where reactions were split: some had to force themselves not to start laughing at the scene where Bakugou fell off the chair because of Todoroki's kiss, while others managed to keep a straight face despite wanting nothing more than to chuckle at it. There were also some short snippets of interviews with people both Todoroki and Bakugou were acquainted with, but, again, the reactions were very visibly split: some were also surprised by the sudden revelation, most simply said they were happy they had finally shared their 'relationship' with the rest of the world. The guidelines Bakugou had sent to their friends seemed to be working as intended, in other words.

Overall, the news regarding their marriage and 'relationship' was being very well received by the official entities and public figures.

Now, the real litmus test for how well their 'mission' was going so far was the last boss of scandals and gossip - social media.

News articles and reports only covered the facts and information regarding the respective story they were covering. Personal opinions and other speculations were hardly ever expressed by any reporter or journalist worth their salt. (Paparazzi and their gossip magazines and blogs were a different story, of course.) But in social media, everyone had a voice and could express whatever they felt like, good or bad. Just because the news was being shared with a positive spin to it didn't mean the regular people were being just as accepting.

Both Shouto and Dynamight had their fans and haters, so there would be opinions of all sorts of ranges being publicly shared on the internet. It was relatively easy for Todoroki to find what he was looking for just by browsing his own name on one of said social media websites. There were posts expressing surprise and shock all over, once again leaving the impression that the two of them had done a brilliant job keeping their relationship private. There was also a surprising number of posts crying over Todoroki no longer being in the 'singles marketplace', even though he had no idea who any of these people were. Some were absolutely gobsmacked that Dynamight even had a single romantically inclined bone in his entire body, as he had always come off as uninterested in anything that wasn't related to pro hero work. Last but not least, there were a few who were very clearly not in favour of their relationship, whether because they were against two men getting married or because they didn't think pro heroes should be wasting their time with such mundane things. Fortunately, these negative comments were outnumbered by the supportive ones and were hardly getting any traction.

Just out of curiosity, Todoroki kept looking around this and that social media, hoping to find any post or comment that could be directly related to Bakugou's side of their deal, but he was out of luck with that one. Much like their 'god' had said, that group of villains was truly good at covering their tracks, both in the real world and online.

"We might not have made any useful discoveries so far, but the news about our marriage seems to be spreading fast," mumbled Todoroki as he returned to the social media app he was most familiar with. He probably would need more than a full day just to read through all the comments being shared there alone, to say nothing of checking every single social media or forum throughout the online landscape. Even this little pause to check how things were going had led him to waste an entire hour without meaning to. Todoroki chuckled, "Bakugou is going to flip out if he finds out I've been procrastinating instead of packing."

His brain was telling him it was time to go back to the gruelling chore of packing his entire life into boxes and disassembling furniture without losing any bits and bobs, but his heart was entirely

somewhere else. Todoroki had spent that entire day doing his best to make his fake relationship with Bakugou believable enough for the rest of the world. He was now seeing the fruits of all of his hard labour; of course he wanted to indulge in it for a little while longer.

"So this is what we look like when we're together, huh…" Todoroki didn't know what to think of the myriad of candid shots of him and Bakugou being shared online, as he was far too used to seeing himself in his work hours posted all over the internet or the news. Being a pro hero simply came with that sort of invasion to his image and privacy, in a way. But on the other hand… Todoroki tilted his head, his gaze closing in on a particular photo of him and Bakugou holding hands as they went about their outside tasks. "Does this make us look like we're married?"

As far as he was concerned, he was acting just like he usually did whenever he was with Bakugou, for the most part. They were adding in all of that handholding, touching and kissing on purpose, but aside from that, nothing much had changed. So Todoroki was having a hard time discerning whether those photos of them truly looked like photos of a couple or not.

"No, it should be working, since all the comments say it is…" mumbled Todoroki under his breath as he scrolled down to a different photo, this time of them at the furniture store looking for the right bed. Every single comment underneath it did hint that their plan was working, and they were successfully fooling everyone into thinking they really were in a romantic relationship. "Hmm… Is it really this easy to convince other people someone is dating?"

Given that he had been involved in some romance-based scandals due to far less evidence, the answer was probably yes, it was *that* easy to convince people of a certain narrative. Todoroki should have felt happy or, at the very least, relieved that their plan was being a success so far, but instead, he felt some mixed feelings about it. Those comments sounded hollow, perhaps because he knew the actual truth.

“Maybe I’m just feeling guilty for lying to all of these people…” concluded Todoroki after thinking about it for a while. He wasn’t a good liar and he also didn’t feel the need to lie as he went about his day. Perhaps that lack of experience with such methods caused these weird, mixed feelings, now that he was being made to create such a big, elaborate lie, which could cause some very serious repercussions to his reputation if they ever got caught. “This is the best way to solve our problems, though, so I guess I just have to get used to it for the time being.”

Now that Todoroki was legally married to Bakugou and they had publicly said as much, there was no going back on their plan. He would have to adapt and grow accustomed to it until their ‘mission’ was successfully completed. Besides, they still had a long way to go until they reached that point. For all they knew, it could take months or maybe even over a year to get everything sorted out permanently. Todoroki had loads of time to think of a proper explanation once the divorce time arrived.

For now, all Todoroki had to do was continue doing what they were doing. It was working, so it was just a matter of perfecting their acting skills to make sure no one would discover the truth. That’s why he kept investigating all of those photos and the comments about them, absorbing all of the positive reactions to better enact them in the future.

To make sure he could remember the tactics that worked the best with a wide array of people, Todoroki gave a like to every single photo with a 75% or higher ‘approval rate’. Then, he picked the photo that had the best ‘approval rate’ of them all and combed through the comments one more time. The photo in question was also from the furniture store, when Bakugou was pinching his cheek and dragging him further away from the restaurant area. Initially, Todoroki was a bit surprised that this was the photo that was getting the most engagement, but the comment section quickly explained it. Comments such as ‘Not the face TTwTT’ and ‘That’s a crime against humanity right there!’ were all over the place. Others were defending Bakugou, claiming ‘That’s child’s play coming from Great Explosion Murder God’ and ‘That punishment is exuding so much married couple energy

lol’.

“Huh… I guess Bakugou was right about the cheek pinching,” marvelled Todoroki as he jumped from comment to comment. His ‘husband’ truly had god-tier people-reading skills, if he could even predict the reaction others would have to a ‘punishment’ he had started on a whim.

Todoroki never minded the pinching all that much, as it was far better than Bakugou’s deadly punches, kicks and explosions, but it was certainly growing on him and becoming something he looked forward to, for as weird as that might sound. If Bakugou was particularly bad-tempered, he made the pinching hurt quite a bit, but it never lasted long enough to cause some serious damage to Todoroki’s cheeks, contrary to what his all-bark-no-bite threats would suggest. It was a pretty unique retaliation tactic, as far as Bakugou’s violent tendencies were concerned, and Todoroki felt quite proud to be its victim. Actually, he could even claim such a punishment was designed specifically for him, since Bakugou had alluded that he wouldn’t do it to anyone else but Todoroki.

That’s why seeing a certain comment saying, ‘Shouto needs to put an end to it before we lose his beautiful face,’ made him stop in his tracks. He needed to put an end to the pinching? But why would he? Bakugou could pinch and touch his face as much as he wanted. It didn’t bother him in the slightest, and he had even become quite fond of it in just a matter of days. So why would he put an end to something that both he and Bakugou clearly enjoyed? That comment sounded so nonsensical to him that Todoroki felt compelled to comment back, ‘It’s okay, I don’t mind when he does that.’

“Well, I should go back to packing or Bakugou will chew my head off instead of pinching me,” sighed Todoroki, finally putting down his smartphone and getting up from the sofa. His goal for the remainder of the day was to have the kitchen and living room area all sorted out by nighttime.

Since Todoroki got so busy with the packing and separating the food that needed to be eaten ASAP vs the food that would be taken with them to their new apartment, he was completely oblivious that his uncharacteristic photo liking spree, plus that one comment, inadvertently broke the internet a second time that day.

Chapter 23

“Alright, that’s good enough for now,” said Bakugou, dusting his hands off the final task of the day.

Somehow, despite all the last-minute changes of plan and the constant interruptions, he had managed to complete everything he had planned, surely only because he was an unrivalled genius and good at everything he did, even when the whole world wanted the fuck around with his schedule. Compared to the half-baked disorganisation of that morning, his living room area was now akin to a fort made out of cardboard boxes on one side, disassembled furniture on the other, all of it neatly labelled and organised according to where they would be placed in the new apartment. In other words, it was a mover’s wet dream come true, just another regular day for Bakugou.

“No, there’s one last thing I need to do before I go to bed…” Bakugou sighed under his breath, a light frown surfacing on his features as he moved his gaze from his packed belongings to the corridor leading to his front door. Even though he was done for the day, there was one thing that would definitely disturb his restful sleep if he didn’t deal with it now.

That one thing was obviously his idiot ‘husband’.

Ugh, why do I have the feeling he’s up to no good?, grumbled Bakugou in the back of his mind as he grabbed his phone and his keys on his way out. Since they parted ways in the elevator, he had been ignoring everyone and everything while packing his things. However, now that he was done with the majority of the packing, had eaten his dinner, was freshly out of his bath, and felt so very ready to go to bed, he could no longer ignore the itchy need to micromanage that trainwreck of a human being. *I am so gonna kill him if he hasn’t done the bare minimum of packing yet… Better yet, I’m gonna make him sleep on the balcony for the first week if he fucks it up…*

It was such a short trip from his apartment to Todoroki's that Bakugou was still grumbling to himself by the time he stopped in front of his door. He was so focused on thinking up all sorts of torturous punishments for him that he failed to notice he had imitated the exact same routine Todoroki had created whenever he paid him unannounced visits, first ringing his doorbell and following it up with a couple of knocks on the door. Some light thumping footsteps could be heard right before the door was opened.

"Bakugou," gasped Todoroki, his actual level of surprise diminished by the expressionlessness of his face and voice. This was the very first time Bakugou had come for a visit to his apartment, so he was beyond amazed by it. Todoroki tilted his head and quickly scanned Bakugou's expression and body language in an attempt to figure out an explanation on his own. Since he couldn't, he ended up voicing a question. "Is something wrong?"

"I'm just here for an inspection, for the sake of my own peace of mind," said Bakugou with a quick shrug. When Todoroki made way for him to enter, he stepped inside his apartment of his own volition, without needing to be dragged inside like the previous time. "Once I'm done checking whether you've been packing like I told you to or procrastinating and staring at the walls, I'm out of here."

"I have been packing this whole time," deadpanned Todoroki as he walked Bakugou to his living room area, feeling just a tiny bit fidgety at his presence there. In all honesty, he had been packing *and* procrastinating a bit on social media, but that was better left unsaid. Once they both arrived at the living room and the chaotic mess all over, Todoroki proudly looked at Bakugou and said, "See?"

"Oh, I can see, alright," sighed Bakugou with a dismissive roll of his eyes. All he could say about it was that it was indeed a job well done by the Half-Assing King. Compared to his packing method, Todoroki's was best described as 'random', with just a little pinch of 'logic' added into it. However, Bakugou had to give credit where credit was due:

Todoroki had made some substantial progress with it. “It might just be barely, but it looks like you’ll make it on time.”

“I could finish it all today, but we have an early morning tomorrow, so I’m thinking of leaving the rest of the packing for after we’re done cleaning the new apartment,” explained Todoroki, feeling quite satisfied with himself for getting Bakugou’s begrudging approval. “Oh, since you’re here, I have a question for you.”

“What is it now?” grumbled Bakugou, suspiciously switching his gaze from the half-heartedly packed cardboard boxes back to Todoroki.

“It’s about the food in my kitchen,” said Todoroki, already walking up to one of his cupboards.

What followed was a full-on discussion regarding said food, with Bakugou lecturing him about his haphazard storing methods and how he would not tolerate that level of chaotic organisation in his kitchen, even if it was only applied to Todoroki’s space. It wasn’t necessarily a topic Todoroki was all that interested in, but since getting along with Bakugou while they were living together was fundamental to their mission, he made a point to listen very closely to everything he said. Eventually, the conversation evolved to discussing how they went about their meals while at home. The kitchen at their new apartment was big enough for two people cooking simultaneously, but there was a very big probability of Todoroki getting in Bakugou’s way on the rare instances where he cooked something himself. That was something they would have to think about later on, especially since they had agreed from the get-go to try to match their work schedules throughout the entire mission: that way, they could be each other’s backup as they went about their respective sides of the deal during their time off from work.

Without either of them noticing, an hour went by in the blink of an eye.

“Thanks for the clarification,” Todoroki said at long last, having run that conversational topic until the very end. He leaned down and opened the freezer section of his fridge, from where he took two ice pops, one of which he gave to Bakugou. “I know it’s late already for you, but here. It would be too troublesome to do the moving with these, so take it as my payment for the help with the kitchen stuff.”

“Hmph.” Bakugou sounded and looked a bit grumpy, but he still took the ice pop nevertheless. One last treat before going to bed wouldn’t do him any harm, all the more so with it just being frozen fruit juice. Plus, they were in the middle of a humid summer. Any type of refreshment was always welcome, regardless of the time of day. He was getting kind of sick of just standing in the middle of the kitchen, though, so he stomped his way to the sofa that had been placed against the wall to create more space in the living room area.

“Oh. I didn’t even ask if you’re okay with that flavour,” noted Todoroki as he followed after Bakugou. His ice pop was strawberry, a very safe, universally liked flavour, but Bakugou’s seemed to be grape, going by the purple colour of the wrapper.

“Yeah, it’s fine,” said Bakugou with a light shrug while he opened the plastic wrapper. “Kinda surprising you have these around, though. You can literally make ice on command.”

“I’ve never seen my Quirk as a source of food,” deadpanned Todoroki, sitting next to Bakugou on the sofa. “Ice doesn’t taste all that good either. It’s frozen water, it has no flavour whatsoever, actually.”

“Just chop it up real good and fine, add some syrup to it, and there you go, homemade shaved ice,” snorted Bakugou right before biting a big chunk out of the top of the cylindrical ice pop. Once that chunk had melted inside his mouth, he snickered some more, a devious smirk on his lips. “Never mind, you can’t even properly chop green onions or

chives. You'd end up with badly cut ice cubes rather than shaved ice."

"I can properly chop green onions now. Probably," retorted Todoroki, sulking slightly at the mention of a certain incident that had happened so many years ago, when they were still high school students. He wanted to believe he had grown quite a lot since then and that a repeat of that failed attempt at chopping herbs would not happen. But then again, he couldn't quite remember if he had chopped green onions again since that incident or not…

"Yeah, I highly doubt that," snickered Bakugou, rolling his eyes at Todoroki once again. If he needed a 'probably' to support his claims, then he definitely hadn't made any improvements whatsoever in his cooking skills. "Keep on eating your mother and sister's food or buying it already made. That way, you'll save us from the trouble of burning the kitchen down while boiling water."

"I have yet to burn a single thing since I started living on my own. I'm not as bad at it as you think I am," Todoroki retorted once again, keeping a cool composure despite Bakugou's attempts at riling him up. Bakugou's teasing, however, reminded him of a conversation he had previously had with his family. He grabbed his smartphone and quickly browsed through the few photos he had in his gallery. Once he found what he was looking for, he turned the screen to Bakugou while slowly munching on the ice pop.

"Pffft!" The moment Bakugou saw that photo of… whatever that was supposed to be, he nearly choked on the frozen treat. He sincerely had no words to describe what he was looking at, aside from potentially the least appetising thing he had ever seen inside of a cooking pot. "'The heck is that, homemade dog food?"

"It's curry…" mumbled Todoroki, his shoulders drooping despondently at Bakugou's mean remark. Dog food was the last thing he'd think about when looking at the pot of curry that he had painstakingly made on his own while following his sister's instructions

via a video call…

“Whoever first invented curry must have been rolling around in their grave while you were cooking that thing,” snorted Bakugou, taking yet another big bite of the ice pop, leaving but half of it behind in the wooden stick. “No wonder your father wants to find you a skilled bride who checks all of his boxes. You’re not ‘living alone’ material. It’s probably a miracle you didn’t crash and burn when you first moved out on your own. And no, living in a dorm that delivers food to your table every single day is not the same thing.”

“……” Having had his next argument exposed and debunked before he could even speak, Todoroki closed his mouth briefly and then silently continued eating his ice pop. By the victorious smirk on Bakugou’s face, he most likely considered that to be an admission of defeat. Well, it most certainly wasn’t. Todoroki was simply sharpening the verbal knives in preparation. “Then, since you became my ‘skilled bride’, will you be cooking for and looking after me to gain my father’s approval? For the sake of our mission, of course.”

“Hey, don’t push it. Pissing off the one who controls the kitchen never ends well for the moron who gets too ahead of himself,” warned Bakugou, throwing a quick glare at Todoroki. After one more bite of the ice pop, followed by a smug scoff, he added, “However, if I ever feel like it, I don’t mind letting you eat my leftovers once I’m done.”

“Oh. Really?” Todoroki immediately perked up at that offer, his heterochromatic eyes nearly sparkling in anticipation. Everyone knew how skilled Bakugou was in the kitchen, even if he did tend to favour spicier dishes. It wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say his cooking brought tears to one’s eyes, both for its occasional high spiciness level and the always present heavenly flavour. It would be insane for Todoroki to turn down Bakugou’s offer right now.

“…This is the part where you’re supposed to be offended about what I just said,” sighed Bakugou, part of him in utter disbelief at Todoroki’s

almost too innocent reaction. Anyone with a working brain would have understood that Bakugou hadn't really meant what he had just said and was just twisting him around his little finger, perhaps as an unconscious petty payback for everything that had happened throughout the day. But not Todoroki, no. He wholeheartedly interpreted that as a well-intentioned offer coming from Bakugou. The way Todoroki was looking at him, his head tilted in confusion, only reinforced that. After an absurdly long stretch of silence, Bakugou sighed a second time, perhaps due to his slightly guilty conscience. "Chip in for the groceries and I'll make some for you too… There's hardly any difference between cooking for one or for two… Also, you'll be in charge of washing the dishes every single day, and you will do it properly. If I see any dry residue on the plates or anywhere else, you'll be expelled from that deal permanently. Understood?"

"Okay," Todoroki readily agreed, accompanied by a quick nod of his head. That was a way better deal than he ever thought possible. Bakugou wasn't one to volunteer himself to do random acts of kindness for other people without gaining something from it. But in this case, the only thing he was truly getting out of this deal was not having to wash the dishes. *Could it be that Bakugou doesn't like doing the dishes? I've never heard him complaining about it before, but I guess it's possible…*

Todoroki tried to search through his memories and everything he knew about Bakugou, but he couldn't find a concrete answer to this particular question. If anything, Bakugou was extremely fastidious about his cleaning standards, which made him more prone to do it himself rather than risk getting a half-baked result from other people. He could still remember how pristine and organised the dorm's common areas had looked on the few days Bakugou and Midoriya were in charge of all of the cleaning as a punishment for fighting on school grounds without permission or supervision of the teachers, and it was all thanks to Bakugou setting very high standards for both of them.

I'll have to do a really good job while washing the dishes from now on, Todoroki told himself as he finished eating his ice pop. He was now dead set on enjoying Bakugou's home-cooked meals throughout the

entire length of their temporary marriage. Long gone were the days when he'd deal with the dishes whenever he had the time to do so. From now on, that chore would be one of his daily priorities, come hell or high water. As he clenched his fist in deep-seated resolution, he felt something solid inside the plastic wrapper of his ice pop. "Hm?"

When he peeked inside the wrapper, he found a little bonus gift there. It looked like that brand of ice pops was currently running some sort of collaboration with something or someone. Todoroki shook around the wrapper until the small gift, which turned out to be a collectable card inside a protective plastic wrapper, fell into his hand.

"Hah, you got Deku, out of everyone. It sure sucks to be you," snorted Bakugou when he saw who was being featured in Todoroki's card. The promotional collab was about the new generation of pro heroes, by the looks of it.

"Who did you get?" asked Todoroki, storing his card away next to his smartphone. The next time he met with Midoriya, he'd give him that card, as he knew he'd really like to add it to his pro hero collection (if he didn't have it already, that is).

Bakugou ate the last chunk of his ice pop and then went to check the inside of the wrapper while the sugary frozen treat refreshingly melted in his mouth. With a bit of prying, he managed to pull the card with his fingers.

"Oh," gasped Todoroki, leaning a bit closer to take a peek at the card. He then looked up at Bakugou as he said, "You got yourself. What a coincidence."

"Not bad," said Bakugou as he closely studied the card featuring Great Explosion Murder God, Dynamight. One of his rare boyish smiles blossomed on his face instantly, pride and a bit of nostalgia warming

up the core of his chest.

Right next to him, a similar warmth plus an additional skipped heartbeat also wormed its way into Todoroki's chest as he saw that gorgeous smile. This was undoubtedly yet another moment he'd be storing away in his memory for the remainder of his life, to go alongside all the other smiles and laughs he had been collecting for several years now.

Perhaps it was a bit weird and maybe even creepy that Todoroki made such a big deal out of seeing Bakugou, in particular, have such a human reaction. He was fully aware it was something on the same level as Midoriya's stalking tendencies, something that Bakugou never had any problem loudly proclaiming to hate so very much. But he just couldn't help himself. He really liked the way Bakugou smiled.

He liked how it erased all traces of his usual frown. How it showed his actual youthful age. How it accentuated his handsome face. How it revealed the softness and gentleness that he hid behind his no-nonsense, bad-tempered persona.

It was a smile that Todoroki had always thought to be so cute, so precious, even when they were high school students.

"Bakugou."

"Hm?" Hearing his name (or better yet, former family name) being called, of course Bakugou turned his head to look at the person who had done so. Todoroki's face promptly came closer, until it got too blurry for him to see it properly. It went without saying that the goal of all of that was to lightly kiss him on the lips. Bakugou hardly had a way out of it, much like he had no way of controlling the warmth now spreading all over his face. Once their lips separated and Todoroki's face was visible again, he grumbled, "...There was absolutely zero

need for this one…”

“Yeah, I know,” said Todoroki, nevertheless leaning closer once again. Although there was no need to kiss him right now, it still aided their mission in the grand scheme of things, so why not do it? And it wasn’t as if Bakugou was saying ‘no’ either, despite his half-hearted complaint.

The leaning had already brought the sides of their bodies together. A single movement of his head and neck was all Todoroki needed to once again feel those soft lips touching his, this time for much longer. He then did it one more time, and then another, again and again. With each kiss, he could feel the heat radiating from Bakugou’s face growing hotter, and he had a suspicion the same could be said about him.

When they reached a new peak of their shared warmth, Todoroki felt like those light and slow pecks were no longer appropriate. The same went for just leaning the side of his body against Bakugou. His hand climbed up to gently but steadily cup Bakugou’s blushing face just as Todoroki slowly licked the even sweeter lips of his moody fake husband. The little groan that came out from that was like music to his ears, and one more reason why this was simply not enough anymore.

With his other hand, Todoroki traced the hem of Bakugou’s t-shirt until he reached the middle of his lower back. The fidgeting and the surprised gasps that always occurred whenever he touched him in that area of his body came with the added benefit of a more relaxed jaw, which in turn allowed Todoroki to finally turn up the intensity of their kissing.

He’s way too easy to kiss, sighed Todoroki in the back of his mind, slightly worried about the ease with which Bakugou let him kiss him. Given how much Bakugou tended to attract the craziest of fans and villains alike, this effortlessness was beyond alarming. He really hoped

this was simply Bakugou opening an exception for him due to their ‘mission’, both for his own safety and Todoroki’s peace of mind. *Well, not like I can complain much, or he won’t let me do this ever again out of pettiness. But that’s beside the point.*

Instead of thinking about why Bakugou would not do something, Todoroki would rather focus on what they were already doing. Mostly because even this escalation in kissing intensity quickly turned into a new normal, due to the number of times they had done so today alone. Since Todoroki always ended up craving just a little bit more compared to the previous time, just kissing Bakugou was not enough. Holding him in his arms and touching his sensitive lower back was not enough.

“Mmmngh…!” A surprised yelp ended up getting muffled by Todoroki’s lips and mouth as Bakugou fell backwards - or better yet, was pushed backwards - until the back of his head hit the soft armrest of the sofa. One of the arms he had been flailing about while falling held onto the backrest of the sofa, while his other hand grabbed onto Todoroki’s arm, whose hand was still cupping his face.

There was a small intermission for their lengthy kisses as Todoroki adjusted his position on the sofa and on top of him, but it only lasted long enough for Bakugou to gulp down some crisp oxygen into his panting lungs. When his mouth finally met with Todoroki’s once again, Bakugou could feel himself melting away into the sofa.

Crap, this isn’t good… Bakugou inwardly mumbled to himself. He was getting way too comfortable with this kissing business with Todoroki. It sounded so stupid, but it was the truth. He kind of felt like giving Todoroki and his ridiculous audacity a right hook to the face or a knee shoved into his gut, but then again, why even bother? He probably even wouldn’t be able to do it in the first place, the way he was holding onto his arm and actually pulling him just a tiny bit closer. *Crap, crap, crap. This makes no sense. We should stop and-*

Just as Bakugou was thinking that, his ‘wish’ came true. Todoroki suddenly stopped and pulled away from him, ending all of those insanely good kisses as abruptly as they had started.

“.....” With the help of his arms and hands against the soft cushions underneath them, Todoroki stood right over Bakugou, his head craned to the side as he stared at the living room’s entrance.

“...What?” asked Bakugou, compelled into doing so by Todoroki’s bizarre reaction to seemingly nothing. He hadn’t heard a thing; he wasn’t seeing anything strange happening in the direction Todoroki was looking, either.

“No, it’s just that this is usually when someone walks in on us, so I was just checking,” calmly explained Todoroki, still midway through the so-called ‘checking’. The earlier interruptions had been annoying enough to leave a lasting impression on him. Now that they were back at it again, he felt like he should do his due diligence first and foremost to not make a vexing trend out of it.

“Seriously?” groaned Bakugou while rolling his eyes dismissively, so very fed up with Todoroki’s silly ideas. Who would even come to his apartment at such a late hour? How would they get inside, since Todoroki never made any mention of giving a copy of his keys to someone else? Bakugou could have said all of that to Todoroki to make him realise how dumb he was being, but that would be way too troublesome when dealing with the densest human being he had ever come across.

Since words were out of the question, Bakugou picked the path of least resistance that he had available. He let go of the sofa’s backrest and hooked his hand around the back of Todoroki’s neck right before he yanked him back down. There, problem solved… even though that meant he was doing the exact opposite of what he had been thinking of wanting to do.

Surprisingly, Todoroki was quick on the uptake and wasted no time picking up where they left off. He continued kissing Bakugou with the same level of urgency as before, right until they were both left breathless. Once they stopped for a bit to catch their breath, he went a step further and picked up exactly where they left off due to Kirishima's untimely arrival. Also, why not pick up where they had also left off because of his father and fellow sidekicks' interruption, while he was at it? Yeah, that sounded like a great plan.

Todoroki's tongue slowly slid down Bakugou's neck, every now and then stopping to kiss his smooth skin. Simultaneously, his hand slipped inside Bakugou's clothes and slithered up his back, the path forward getting unimpeded as Bakugou arched his spine in reaction to all of that.

He had initially been grabbing onto Todoroki's arm and neck, but he soon was forced to let go of the back of his neck to cover his mouth with his hand. It wasn't perfect, as little groans and sighs still slipped through his fingers, but it was far better than nothing. Todoroki found that to be slightly amusing and might or might not have deliberately lapped and sucked on the side of his neck even harder just to see what would happen.

"Ngh…!" Bakugou's body jolted from head to toes, but his hand fulfilled its job as well as it could, given the circumstances. Saying he was so embarrassed by it he could crawl into a hole and never come out again would be an understatement.

Todoroki, on the other hand, was enjoying every second of it and looking for new, better ways to get a reaction out of him. He already had Bakugou's okay to go ahead and touch him, so why not see how far he could truly go? It would be much better to find that out now rather than during a riskier, high-stakes situation.

At first, curiosity was the main driving force for Todoroki to make a pass on him, but it very quickly turned into him simply wanting to touch Bakugou more and more, just like all the previous times. The difference between the regular Bakugou that he was used to and the one melting like butter with each and every caress was just too captivating and irresistible. It was no wonder so many people wanted to get him in their 'team', even if none of those people had ever seen him looking like this.

Or at the very least, I don't think anyone has…, mumbled Todoroki in the back of his head, taking his time suckling and softly scratching his teeth right where Bakugou's neck met with his shoulder. He knew Bakugou wasn't interested in anything that wasn't related to his pro hero career, but most men had their own needs to look after… Who knew what else Bakugou was up to behind closed doors, good as he was at avoiding scandals and those 'professional stalkers' he disliked so much?

Well, now Todoroki felt kind of irked.

He didn't have proof of anything and all he was doing was thinking to himself, but the mere thought of it annoyed him greatly, that he was sure of. The only thing that helped it subside somewhat was the fact that Todoroki was the one who had ended up marrying Bakugou. That was an achievement no one would ever be able to take away from him. He had already won the war before he even noticed that he was in one in the first place.

Right, we are *married, so I guess all of this is normal,* concluded Todoroki, cooling down substantially in one regard, but getting exponentially more fired up in another. In the end, all of this that he felt and experienced always converged back to the fact that, technically, they were a through-and-through married couple. There was no need to overthink things too much since the answer was right before his eyes.

With that out of the way, Todoroki happily proceeded with his impatient caresses with redoubled decidedness. His lips parted from the base of his neck to the little bit of his collarbone that he could see peeking from his t-shirt. The layer of velvety skin and bouncy flesh covering the hard bone was as delicious to bite into in this sort of circumstance as it was during meal time - only that Bakugou was an even better delicacy, the way he reacted to the bite by tightly closing his eyes and squirming around some more. It truly was the best incentive to keep going.

Moving down lower, his direct access to Bakugou's body was readily denied by the layer of fabric clothing him. But they were in the middle of the summer and all Bakugou was wearing was your regular t-shirt and pants. He could perfectly feel the softness and hardness of his body underneath the thin fabric, and their body heat was being transmitted to one another just as well as before.

Instead of continuing to lick and kiss him uninterruptedly, Todoroki first zeroed in on a specific spot before pouncing on it. Years and years of training and fighting had sculptured Bakugou's body into a delicate but bountiful figure that couldn't be fully hidden by his clothes, so it was fairly easy to find the well-known sensitive areas of the human body. Todoroki bit and suckled on Bakugou's nipple through his clothes, the fabric soaking in his saliva. Even though he wasn't touching it directly, he could still feel it steadily hardening inside his mouth.

"Ah-! H-Hey…!" yelped Bakugou, his voice leaking out from beneath his hand out of both shock and embarrassment. He could feel his face burning like a furnace, but he still went through the trouble of lifting his head from the armrest and peeking downwards in Todoroki's direction. That gave him a front-row seat to Todoroki slowly, almost carefully, biting the hardened tip of his nipple; the act of which caused something akin to an electric current to zap up his spine and made him tremble all over. "Ngh…! Stop it, that hurts, you damned pervert!"

"It only hurts?" asked Todoroki, making direct eye contact with

Bakugou as he followed his words with a light nibble and pull to the nipple covered by the wet portion of the t-shirt.

“……!!” The way Bakugou’s face got even redder, although not as dark as his crimson eyes, was enough to answer that question. He somehow managed to cover his mouth on time to stop whatever embarrassing sound was about to escape from his vocal cords, but the way his body reacted to it was just as awkward.

It was awkward for Bakugou only, though, as the whole thing had stoked Todoroki’s fire even hotter. He wasn’t one to mince his words or actions, so Todoroki didn’t even have to think twice about using the hand he was caressing his back with to lift Bakugou’s t-shirt all the way up to his neck, fully exposing his muscled torso. As his lips and tongue busied themselves with getting Bakugou’s other nipple just as hard and wet, his hand kept fondling that initial nipple, his fingers every now and then either pinching and pulling it or rubbing and pressing it down.

“Ah! Wai- Ngh… Haa…!” Bakugou’s complaints died down just as they were about to come out of his mouth, the reason unknown to him. His head also dropped back down to the sofa’s armrest, feeling far too sapped of strength to keep it lifted like that. Any cooling down the ice pop might have brought to his body was now long gone, replaced by a suffocating warmth far hotter than the worst summer day he had ever lived through. Just covering his mouth with his hand wasn’t cutting it anymore, so he resorted to biting the back of his index finger to try to keep his voice down, but the results of that were just as lacklustre and faulty. “Nggh… Haa, ah… T-Todo…ro… Ahhh…!”

“Ngh…!” Hearing Bakugou call out his name with such a sultry voice hit him so hard that he accidentally bit his nipple with enough strength to leave a well-defined tooth mark on his flushed skin. He would have felt bad about that had Bakugou not moaned out of pleasure and instead screamed from pain. Todoroki licked it a couple more times, as if wanting to soothe it down a bit, but then he sat up once again, adjusting his position on the sofa’s cushion to be able to

bring himself to the same level as Bakugou, since he had slipped down quite a bit to be able to play with his chest.

That allowed him to take a good look at Bakugou's face from above, even with him lying his head down on the armrest. His expression, too, was absolutely irresistible. Todoroki could barely keep himself under control at the sight of his flushed cheekbones, his soft, tear-stained eyes, his gasping, parted lips, no frown whatsoever contorting his face. Calling him 'erotic' would be a disservice, as he had far surpassed the limitations of said word.

Todoroki's crumbling self-restraint couldn't last much longer than that. He passionately kissed Bakugou with wanton abandon, unable to keep his hands away from him for even a single second. And by the looks of it, he wasn't the only one. Bakugou, too, promptly wrapped his arms around his back and grabbed onto his shirt with shaky fingers. That tight embrace made their kissing feel a hundred times better.

"Haa… If only you could see what you look like right now…" Todoroki chuckled right against Bakugou's lips as they took another quick break to catch their breath. This was yet another 'Bakugou moment' that he would never be able to take out of his mind. He never thought he'd be adding something other than smiles to his little collection, but here he was, committing every nook and cranny of Bakugou's lewd appearance to memory.

"You're… one to… speak…" retorted Bakugou in between gasping breaths. Todoroki had also long lost that collected expressionlessness he strutted about with every single day. Regardless of what he might look like right now, Bakugou could bet Todoroki wasn't that far behind either.

"Fair enough," conceded Todoroki, willing to admit that he also wasn't with the most presentable of appearances right now. He gave a quick peck to Bakugou's rosy cheek before he proceeded to taste his

mouth and relish on his tongue all over again. It was so, so very hard to stop kissing him once they got the ball rolling. The fact that neither of them was denying themselves of it either made it twice as hard.

The only downside was that things were getting a bit too steamy. Literally. Even with the AC running, Todoroki could already feel little droplets of sweat sliding down his temples. His body felt smouldering hot, the same could be said about Bakugou, and they were both sticking super close to one another on that cramped sofa. It was no wonder it felt so stuffy, even though Todoroki could easily use his Quirk to refresh both of them.

Instead, Todoroki pulled away from Bakugou just the slightest, the bare minimum so he could grab the hem of his t-shirt and pull it upwards. Since Bakugou was still holding onto it, he ended up getting roped into aiding Todoroki take his shirt off. That alone made him feel a whole lot better. Todoroki then did the same to Bakugou, finishing what he had already kind of started when he had rolled up his t-shirt to more easily access his bare chest.

Having a half-undressed Bakugou underneath him was even more tantalising than Todoroki had initially thought. That didn't make such sense to him, as they had seen each other fully naked more times than they could count, thanks to the shared bath at Heights Alliance. But Todoroki figured that different circumstances set completely different types of moods. What they were doing right now could never have happened back then at a shared bath in a dorm.

Todoroki kept the kisses going, much to Bakugou's pleasure, but he didn't give a break to his hands either. One of them had to be left on the sofa's cushions, to prevent him from squashing Bakugou underneath him and for additional stability, but the other one was free to roam around wherever it pleased. At first, it simply stayed near his lower back, enjoying all the back arching and fidgeting his caresses brought out of Bakugou. But, again, Todoroki was turning out to be shamelessly greedy. Those caresses eventually stopped being enough, as they usually did with someone with an insatiable hunger.

As such, his hand departed for greener southern pastures. The elastic band of Bakugou's pants was so very easy to breach and move out of the way, pulling his clothes further down his thighs as his hand also travelled south. Just like with his t-shirt, Bakugou's pants were gone in the blink of an eye. The only thing left now was his underwear.

"Ah. Bakugou, can I take off your boxers too?" asked Todoroki out of the blue, his thumb already tugging at the waistband of said boxers. He had gotten so caught up in the moment that he forgot that it was probably pretty rude to undress someone without their explicit permission.

"You're asking that now!?" hissed Bakugou, breaking free from the pleasurable haze overtaking his brain thanks to Todoroki's stupid question. And now that he was thinking a bit more clearly, wasn't this a pretty extreme situation he was finding himself in? "Why are you trying to get me naked in the first place, you perv!?"

"Well, I mean…" said Todoroki, his words trailing off as his gaze dropped from Bakugou's blushing face down to his chest, then further down to his stomach, and then further down still to…

"Hey, eyes up here!" admonished Bakugou, promptly grabbing Todoroki's face by the cheeks with one hand and forcing him to look back up to his face.

"At this rate, you might end up soiling your underwear," deadpanned Todoroki, finally finishing that sentence he had started, despite his pointed gaze never having reached its intended target.

"C-Couldn't you have phrased that a bit more nicely!?" Bakugou hissed, his face immediately switching to bloodthirsty demon king

mode. He did not like the implication of what Todoroki had just said, be it its actual meaning, be it the more common interpretation of such phrasing. Either way, a crappy choice of words was the last thing he should be worrying about right now. Bakugou let go of Todoroki's face and then placed his hand against his chest, intending to push him further away from him. "Just go somewhere else for a bit… Or better yet, let me go back home already…"

"No," said Todoroki, nice and short, but still firmly enough to get Bakugou to croak an incredulous 'Huh?' He leaned his face closer to Bakugou's, until the tips of their noses were almost touching. "You're always complaining about me doing things in a half-assed way, right? Well, I'm taking full responsibility for my actions right now. I started it, so I'll end it too."

"What!?" yelped Bakugou, his heart nearly jumping out through his mouth due to how suddenly it had accelerated. As a result, his blood was pumping that much faster, so his face turned beet red in what could be considered record time. "Are you out of your mind!? Do you even realise what you're saying right now!?"

"No, I'm not out of my mind, and yes, I do know what I'm saying," sighed Todoroki, his face breaking into its trademark expressionlessness. He placed his hand back on Bakugou's hips, his fingers wrapping themselves around his underwear's waistband once again. "Besides, there's hardly any difference between kissing and touching at this point, right?"

"Of course there's a big, BIG difference between kissing and so-called 'touching'!!!" Bakugou retorted in total panic, promptly slapping his hand on top of Todoroki's to prevent him from pulling down his underwear. "I can't believe I even have to say this out loud, but 'touching' another guy's junk is way more than just touching, alright!? Touching and 'touching' are not the same. Kissing and touching and 'touching' are also not the same! They're all separate categories and should never be put together in the same box! Okay!?"

“You’re making zero sense right now, Bakugou,” said Todoroki, calmly waiting for Bakugou’s hissy fit to pass by so he could proceed forward.

“I don’t want to be told that by you, especially not while you’re trying to take off the last piece of clothing I have on!!!” hissed Bakugou. He gave a couple of tugs to Todoroki’s wrist, but the damned idiot refused to move his hand from his underwear.

“You’re so stubborn,” sighed Todoroki, despite his still very collected semblance (or as collected as one could be in this type of situation). Now that Bakugou’s contrarian tendencies had been instigated to the max, it would be quite hard to disable them once again. Yes, it’d be hard… but definitely not impossible. “Did you have any problem with it when I was kissing you?”

“N-No, but…” grumbled Bakugou, the angry frown on his face softening into a more sulking expression, rather than one of pure rage.

“What about when I was touching you?” asked Todoroki next, his head tilting slightly to go along with his question.

“T-There was none, but that doesn’t mean……” mumbled Bakugou, his cheeks getting both puffier and redder from a mix of pouting and feeling embarrassed.

“That doesn’t mean…?” repeated Todoroki, gently urging him to keep going. However, by the look on Bakugou’s face, he had very little hope of that sentence ever getting finished. While he would have preferred to hear the whole thing, Todoroki was also okay with leaving it at just that, since he had already gotten what he wanted. “Well, if there’s no problem, then there’s no problem.”

“Mmmnffh…!?” Before Bakugou had the opportunity to snap at him

once again, Todoroki one-upped him and sealed his mouth with a kiss. Since he was so weak against pleasure, it was a no-brainer to use that in Todoroki's favour and as a little aid to get Bakugou to mellow out once again.

And, just like planned, in a matter of minutes, the grip around Todoroki's wrist weakened to a light touch. Even Todoroki was slightly surprised at how effective that was.

You really are way too easy, Bakugou, Todoroki sighed in the back of his mind, that twinge of worry once again lodging itself in his chest. It was quite hypocritical of him to think such, since he was taking advantage of it as we speak, but this was a really dangerous weakness to have. Then again, he also knew Bakugou had a chronic inability to be honest with other people and himself, and he also refused to do anything that he didn't want to do, regardless of whatever it might be. Todoroki softly kissed his way closer to Bakugou's ear, where he whispered, "Tell me to stop if you don't like it."

"Nngh…" Lips pursed shut, Bakugou's body shuddered as Todoroki's hand slipped inside his underwear, his warm, rough fingers carefully wrapping themselves around his aroused member. Just as he was growing more and more embarrassed and agitated, Todoroki coincidentally did him a solid by distracting him a bit when he had the genius *cough* hewasbeingsarcastichere *cough* idea of licking his ear.

Still, a bomb could blow up right next to his face and Bakugou still wouldn't be able to forget the fact that he was literally getting a handjob from Todoroki. It was far too ridiculous a thing to be ignored or minimised. Adding to the fact that Todoroki was also nibbling and suckling on his earlobe, too, now… Yeah, Bakugou was definitely in a bit of a pickle here.

"Haa… This… won't do…" rasped Bakugou, trying to speak in one go at the same time he rolled his slightly curled body to the side. As he

also tried to escape from the tingling sensation of having his ear licked and nibbled, his head ended up sliding down from the armrest to the cushion underneath him. Despite that, Todoroki's hand didn't move a single inch away from his underwear, fingers still wrapped around his cock as he stroked it up and down painstakingly slowly. Bakugou's earlier gasping words triggered some change, however, as those slow movements soon picked up the pace somewhat. That made it even harder on Bakugou, in all sorts of ways. "Ngh… T-Todo… haa… can't… it's… ngh… impossible…"

"…How do you usually do it, then?" asked Todoroki after swallowing the hard lump that had lodged itself in his throat. He had to agree with Bakugou; this really wouldn't do. It was not fair how hot Bakugou looked right now, even as he did his best to keep his voice down. The more Bakugou tried to resist the pleasure, the more turned on Todoroki got. He wasn't even supposedly into this kind of dynamic, but Bakugou made it out to be too captivating. The pumping motions of his hand slowed down to a stop, but in exchange, his grip tightened a bit as he rubbed and stimulated the head of his cock only. The way Bakugou's entire body jolted and bounced against the sofa while biting down on his finger was more arousing than anything Todoroki had ever seen. "If you tell me how you usually jerk off, I'll do it for you."

"Not… ah… telling, ngh…" Bakugou whimpered, eyes tightly closed as he rubbed his forehead against Todoroki's support-bearing arm while shaking his head. His free hand soon followed, fingers weakly gripping and scratching onto Todoroki's wrist. Bakugou wasn't even doing it on purpose; he was simply holding onto the closest thing to him. But to Todoroki, that was the same as telling him to keep going, to touch him more and make him feel even better. A stronger rub right above his urethra got him throwing his head back, further away from the hand that was keeping his voice down. "Ahh! Todo…roki… wait, ah…"

"'Wait'? But no 'stop'?" asked Todoroki, for clarification's sake. Bakugou's gasping silence said more than a million words could. He really was too good at pushing his buttons, whether intentionally or not. Much to Bakugou's audible discontent, Todoroki let go of his

cock, though only because he really needed his hand somewhere else. To hush his complaints, he kissed and nibbled at the end of his shoulder, then moved down to do the same to his shoulder blade and back. All the while, his hand occupied itself with finally pulling down Bakugou's underwear, the tips of his warm fingers teasingly sliding against his toned thighs. It wasn't as easy as his pants, given Bakugou's sideways lying position, but Todoroki somehow made it work with sheer determination and horniness. That little intermission for undressing purposes allowed Bakugou to curl up his body some more, though, which was now getting more in the way than his clothes ever had. Todoroki placed his hand on the upper-front side of his thighs, his fingers being pushed in opposite directions to urge him to spread his legs open. "Bakugou, I can't continue touching you like this."

"Then… don't touch…" mumbled Bakugou, his body trembling due to the little kisses and nibbles Todoroki was patiently delivering all over his upper back.

"That's not an option," Todoroki smoothly denied, giving a stronger bite to his shoulder blade to let that sink in fully. His stubbornness was pretty cute, but Bakugou would look even better if he just gave in already. Since he didn't see that happening any time soon, Todoroki gave up on trying to reason with him through words and instead poured all of his attention into seducing Bakugou's body into compliance.

If he touched the right places, he could get Bakugou moving and fidgeting around without him even meaning to. Depending on how and where he licked and nibbled at his scarred back, Bakugou would arch it this way or move his legs around that way. If Todoroki waited long enough, he'd get his opportunity.

And when that opportunity did come, he grabbed hold of it right away, promptly immobilising his legs when Bakugou finally uncurled his body enough for him to get access to his groin once again.

“Nngh…!” Bakugou’s forehead bumped against Todoroki’s arm once again, just as he was biting down on his lower lip to stifle a moan. He had momentarily cooled down a bit, but now that Todoroki was once again jerking him off, that giddy, tingling excitement came back with a vengeance. At this point, he really just wanted to come and be done with it. But just because he wanted to doesn’t mean he would…
“Ngh… I keep telling you… I can’t… Haa, ah…”

“Which is why I keep asking you what you want me to do,” said Todoroki, his voice getting lower and more husky the more he himself got seduced by Bakugou’s lewd body and reactions. Bakugou only shook his head, though his silence was broken by Todoroki once again escalating the pumping motions of his hand. He could tell by the dazed glint in Bakugou’s crimson eyes that his stubbornness was the only thing keeping them in this stalemate. A few more incentives were in need, by the looks of it. Todoroki slowly, almost teasingly so, licked the curved edge of Bakugou’s ear, whispering once he reached the top. “If you don’t tell me, I’ll have to find out on my own, and you might not like that.”

“Ahh, haa…” Bakugou would have liked to say, ‘Threats don’t work on me,’ but rather than words, a lascivious half-moan crawled out of his mouth. How annoying. How aggravating. If he didn’t do anything, Todoroki would just continue getting bolder and bolder with his teasing. So, as a way to retaliate against that, Bakugou moved his finger away from his lips, moist from his own saliva, and leaned closer to Todoroki’s arm. The angle wasn’t all that good, but he still managed to capture some of his skin in between the teeth, biting and then licking that now reddened area. His second attempt went a bit better. Once he scooched his head closer to Todoroki’s arm, he was able to give a proper gnawing bite to just above his wrist. His wet, pink tongue could then be seen slowly tracing the teeth marks dug into his skin.

There was no man on Earth strong enough to resist something as sensual as that, and Todoroki was definitely no exception.

For the first time in a good while, Todoroki sat up straight rather than

hovering right above Bakugou. He kept on jerking him off, but with his other hand now freed from supporting his weight, he got to partially cup Bakugou's flushed face, his thumb pushing against his moist lips until it reached the tips of the upper teeth that had bitten onto his arm. Bakugou's warm breath tickled against his skin, only getting even hotter as he slid his thumb on his slippery tongue.

Since Bakugou couldn't muffle his voice with Todoroki's fingers in the way, little moans and groans kept coming out without a way to stop them. When he moved on from rubbing his tongue to the roof of his mouth, his body jolted and trembled once again. Todoroki could even feel Bakugou's hard cock twitching and dripping even more pre-cum. All of these things only made his pants feel even tighter and more constricted around his crotch.

Being this erotic without even trying had to be illegal. Todoroki really had to congratulate himself for getting this far without going crazy or worse. It was also impressive that, even though he was this ridiculously turned on, Bakugou hadn't reached his climax either. That definitely took some stellar endurance, or perhaps Todoroki was just that bad at giving handjobs. He wanted to believe the problem lay within Bakugou rather than in his technique, but Todoroki wouldn't be surprised either way, given his lack of experience in this sort of affair.

Well, I guess I have no other choice, sighed Todoroki to his own buttons. Since Bakugou still refused to tell him anything, he truly had no choice but to improvise a bit. He carefully took his fingers from Bakugou's mouth, thin strings of saliva following them throughout the departure until they snapped apart from the increasing distance. His other hand also stopped jerking Bakugou off, even though it remained in that area. With both hands at his disposal, it was much easier to get Bakugou to lie down on his back once again, which was then immediately followed by Todoroki forcing his legs to be spread wide open before Bakugou had the chance to move around and cover himself once again.

"Ah! Wait!" yelped Bakugou, yet again assaulted by flustered panic.

Such an exposed position, while buck naked, left nothing to the imagination. Todoroki would be able to see every nook and cranny of his body, even if he tried to cover himself with his hands. “W-What are you going to do?”

“I don’t know, you tell me,” said Todoroki, his head slightly tilted as he looked Bakugou straight in the eye. He was sitting right in the middle of his legs, each hand holding his knees in place so Bakugou wouldn’t be able to shut them closed once again. But, just like before, Bakugou kept his silence, even though he looked so embarrassed he could pass out at any moment now. “If you don’t say anything, I really will have to find out on my own.”

“Ngh…” Bakugou wanted to call his bluff, but unfortunately, Todoroki’s statement was followed by proper actions that fully backed it up. His right hand slid down from his knee to his inner thigh, placing enough pressure on his leg to make sure Bakugou wouldn’t be able to move it from that position.

It kept travelling lower and lower, while their eye contact remained intact thanks to their stubbornness and unwillingness to lose. Once that hand reached his groin, it switched its touch to just fingers, making each caress as ticklish as it felt good. Todoroki slowly ran his finger down the length of his erect penis, first from the side but then switching to the underside as it got closer to his testicles. Bakugou was still completely silent, even with all the squirming and fidgeting caused by that light touch.

Soon, Todoroki’s finger reached his balls, the last stop of that downwards route - or so Bakugou thought. Instead of stopping, Todoroki kept going lower. Now, it was Bakugou’s stubborn silence that was being put to the test. The lower Todoroki’s finger went, the more panicky his face became.

“N-Not there…!” Bakugou finally cracked just as Todoroki’s finger was about to insert itself between his buttocks. Todoroki stopped moving

his finger right away, though not before Bakugou's face went beet red once again.

Oh, so that's how it is, concluded Todoroki in the back of his mind. He had finally connected all the dots without Bakugou needing to utter a single word more about it. He could now understand why Bakugou had been so adamant about the viability of a handjob. "Well, that's fine too."

"Wah…!" Before Bakugou could ask him what that was supposed to mean, Todoroki wrapped his arms around his waist and back and pulled him up into a sitting position. He then picked him up from the sofa with the same ease of lifting a bag of feathers and propped him over his shoulder. "Hey, what are you-!?"

"I'll let you kick me afterwards," Todoroki simply said as he nonchalantly carried Bakugou to his bedroom. He turned on the lights and closed the door behind themselves before making a direct beeline to the bed.

"That's beside the point! You can't just- Ack!" Bakugou kept on raging and complaining, but his hissy fit was interrupted by being suddenly dropped. He fortunately landed on the cushy mattress of Todoroki's old bed, but the scare still made his heartbeat spike to a faster rhythm. "Can you listen to what I'm saying for once!?"

"Here. We can use these, right?" asked Todoroki, Bakugou's words flying right past his ears since he had been too busy rummaging through the drawer on his nightstand. What he placed on top of the bed while taking a seat next to Bakugou was a brand-new bottle of lube and a pack of condoms.

"…Huh?" That had been such an unexpected and bizarre question and reveal for someone like Todoroki that Bakugou's brain was still in the

middle of processing what was going on. However, no matter how much he thought about it, he still couldn't make any sense out of it. "Why do you…?"

"Let's just say someone gave us a wedding gift shortly after we got married," deadpanned Todoroki, his voice as monotone as his expressionless face looked like. He didn't want to be directly responsible for Kaminari's death, so he decided not to name-drop anyone nor provide any hints or explanations as to when and how this gift was presented to him… or so he thought.

"I'm gonna fuckin' kill that moron," growled Bakugou, his face turning so demonic it would have to be censored to protect any poor soul around him. "I'm gonna strangle him with his last brain cell and then make sure his grave has 'Dunce Face, finally dead, the world is at peace again' written in really big letters and in at least 50 different languages!"

"Now I really want to know how exactly you knew right away it was Kaminari," said Todoroki, his face becoming even stonier, though for a completely different reason. Why oh why would Kaminari give something like this to them if he wasn't privy to certain private information regarding his friend?

"Huh? Isn't it obvious!?" Bakugou barked in response, unconsciously redirecting his anger at one of the victims rather than the perpetrator. "He's the only one who is both dumb *and* scared enough to give it to *you*! The other morons would have come directly to me and taken a punch to the face like a man! Well, now he's gonna take a punch to the face *and* get bent into a fucking human pretzel!"

"Oh," interjected Todoroki, his whole demeanour going back to normal. So that was the kind of reasoning that had led Bakugou to find the culprit almost instantly. It was a far simpler explanation than he was expecting. What a relief… "Anyway, let's leave Kaminari aside for the time being."

“Huh…?” gasped Bakugou, his brain yet again going into overload and crashing as Todoroki pinned him down against the bed with just one hand. What about his other hand, you ask? Well, it was obviously in the middle of popping open the lid of the bottle of lube and turning it upside down right above Bakugou’s lower half. “Huh?”

“Oh, it’s more viscous than I thought it would be,” noted Todoroki, staring in fascination as the lube oozed out of the bottle and slowly dripped down on top of Bakugou’s groin. He could feel his body flinching in reaction to the contact with this thick goop. “Sorry, is it too cold? Should I have warmed it up a bit before?”

“HUH!?” Only now, after hearing that ridiculous question, did Bakugou have the necessary bandwidth to deal with and respond to all of this craziness. He grabbed Todoroki’s hand and forced him to turn the bottle of lube upwards once again. “Okay, hold your freaking horses! I know I’m repeating myself here, but are you out of your mind!?”

“I already told you no, I’m not. And yes, I also fully understand what I’m saying and doing,” sighed Todoroki, coincidentally guessing what Bakugou was about to say next, the way he clicked his tongue at him. He closed the small lid of the bottle with his thumb and placed it down on the bed next to them. “I thought I had made my intentions perfectly clear, but I guess I didn’t. I told you I’d take full responsibility and that I’d finish what I had started, right? If this is how you usually jerk off and can only come like this, then I’ll do it.”

“Y-You’ll do it, you say… You’ll do what?” Bakugou stammered, part of him hoping Todoroki would just say something as idiotic and silly as he usually did. However, rather than open his mouth to provide him with a proper answer, the shameless moron dipped his fingers in the lube dripping down from his crotch and then slid them straight towards his ass. Bakugou immediately intervened before it was too late. “O-Okay, I get it, just hold on! First things first, you totally do not understand what you’re saying and doing! Second, I never told

you to take responsibility like this! Last but definitely not least, we shouldn't be doing any of this in the first place! We've taken things way too far, for some reason. Rather than get all impulsive and do dumb shit, we should be stopping and thinking really well about what the heck we're about to do right now!"

"Why?" asked Todoroki, genuinely not understanding why they needed to go through all of that trouble when the matter in question was so crystal clear. "Aren't we already married? It might just be for the sake of our mission, but the whole process is still real. So I don't see why there would be any problem with what we're doing. You even said it yourself that you didn't mind me kissing and touching you. And you've been feeling good enough to still be this hard."

"Y-Yeah, but…" mumbled Bakugou, his thoughts already swirling around inside his brain. Everything Todoroki had just said was right. They were legally married. Neither of them saw kissing and touching each other as something problematic. And it definitely felt hella good to do this with Todoroki. But despite all of that, there was still something about all of that that didn't fully sit well with him…

"Bakugou, I don't know about any should's or shouldn't's, but we definitely could," said Todoroki, placing his hands on either side of Bakugou's head on the bed so he could lean closer to him. The half-reticent, half-sulky look on his face was almost as cute as his rare smiles. The only thing that remained unchanged was his eyes, still as strong and straightforward as they always were. Seeing all of that, Todoroki couldn't help but let a small smile reach his own lips.

Instead of asking him, 'What do you think?', Todoroki tentatively kissed him, nothing more than a small peck that lasted for no longer than a second. Knowing Bakugou, a 'fuck no' would have resulted in some sort of violent, physical penalty. Since there was nothing aside from one more of those adorable blushing expressions, Todoroki knew it was safe to kiss him again.

He also didn't waste any more time getting down to brass tacks, going right for the kill with the next kiss. They had been messing around for long enough for him to have barely any self-restraint in stock. Bakugou was most likely in a similar position, with everything going on with his lower half.

As they were kissing like their lives depended on it, Bakugou wrapped his arms around Todoroki's back, pulling him even if just a millimetre closer. Todoroki interpreted that as his way of saying, 'go ahead,' and promptly pounced on that opportunity. He once again plunged his fingers into the sticky lube that Bakugou's lower half was drenched in and then slid them across the curvature of his groin until they arrived at his perky ass. By following his buttocks, he easily found the little hole he had been looking for.

Todoroki wasn't really sure what he was supposed to expect from it, but that hole he was prodding with his finger was seductively tight and so very soft to the touch. He felt Bakugou's body get stiffer due to the intrusion, but that was promptly fixed with a few more deep kisses. In no time, Todoroki could more or less match the thrusting motions of his finger with when Bakugou relaxed his body out of pleasure. When he resumed licking and nibbling Bakugou's body all over, it became easy enough that he could insert a second finger into that gooey tightness.

"Bakugou… where does it feel the best? Here? Or here?" asked Todoroki, thrusting his fingers inside Bakugou as deep as they could reach. A choked-up gasp came out from right below the skin of the neck that he was voraciously licking and sucking, accompanied by the tight squeezing of the hole's stretched entrance. A pretty nice response, if he did say so himself. But by placing his fingers at a certain upward angle and then thrusting them back in, that gasp became a loud moan, his voice brimming over with desire. His fingers were sweetly squeezed once again by those soft, fleshy walls as Bakugou's whole body trembled from pleasure. "Here, huh?"

"Ahh! Haa, haa… Ngh, ahh!" Todoroki was so relentless with his sensual ministrations to his body that Bakugou hardly had any leeway

to do anything besides moaning and breathing. He could hardly move his body, too weakened by the never-ending barrage of sensations, but damn if it didn't feel good. Now that Todoroki had found the spot that gave him the most pleasure, he was utterly doomed to come undone by his touch. Bakugou just wanted to come so badly that he didn't even care anymore how it happened. "Todo…ki… Haa, To… doroki…!"

"Ngh!" Since Bakugou was holding onto his back but was hardly putting any strength into it, Todoroki could easily break free from that hold and sit up straight. Although he would have loved to continue fingering him and find out all the different spots that got Bakugou moaning his brains out, he couldn't do it any longer. His dick was literally on the verge of exploding, and not in the fun kind of way.

He had to take his fingers from inside him to be able to use both of his hands to unbuckle his pants and take them off together with his underwear, joining Bakugou in his belated nakedness. He didn't even need to rub or touch himself in any way; his cock was already up to it and standing at attention just from watching the erotic mess he had made Bakugou become. And all of that had only been caused by his mouth and fingers. Todoroki could hardly wait to see what would happen once they went a step or two above that.

The restrictive feeling of the condom he put on was a pretty weird foreign sensation, but he was sure he'd forget all about that the moment he got a taste of that soft, wet crevice he had so painstakingly stretched.

"Nngh… Haa, ahhh…!" moaned Bakugou, his back arching away from bed as his hole was opened up and stretched as much as it could go. Whoever had said that fingers and a dick were the same could go fuck themselves and get the disappointment of a lifetime. Fingers never did and never would make him climax in one go. Todoroki's cock, however… Yeah, this was going to get relegated to the 'moments that never actually happened, I swear' box in his brain's memory storage facility. Bakugou was already gasping and wheezing by the time his back hit the mattress once again.

“Don’t rest just yet, Bakugou. I have yet to come,” said Todoroki as he lifted and adjusted the position of one of Bakugou’s legs. Once he was done creating the right amount of space for himself, he put his hips to good use right away.

“Ahh! Wai- Ngh, ah!” Despite his half-hearted request, Todoroki definitely did not wait. Thanks to that angle and position, his cock was rubbing and grinding against that sensitive spot of his, again and again. It felt so good that it wouldn’t surprise him if he went insane. No, Bakugou had probably gone insane a long time ago, and this was simply the result of said insanity. “Ngh, haa… Todo…ki… more…”

“Seriously, you…!” Todoroki was already pretty fired up as it was, so why Bakugou would want to instigate him even further was beyond him. Each thrust got him singing like a cat in heat, his feverish body trembling and jolting from the pleasure born from the friction. He was pretty much melting with how good Todoroki was making him feel. And he had to admit, the sentiment was definitely mutual. Bakugou had never looked as good and appetising as he did with Todoroki’s dick inside him, and that was half of the reason why his self-restraint was now officially completely depleted. “If you want more, I’ll give you more… Haa… But don’t come complaining to me afterwards.”

This time, Todoroki did exactly as requested and gave a stronger thrust that got Bakugou’s body bouncing against the bed. He was going so deep inside Bakugou, it was hard to tell whether the clenching of those soft, gooey walls was his body trying to stop him from going deeper still or if it simply didn’t want to let go of him. Whatever discomfort Bakugou had initially felt was now completely gone, replaced by pure rapture. He looked so sexy and beautiful that Todoroki’s heart couldn’t make up its mind about whether it wanted to skip a couple of beats or race faster than a sports car.

Once Todoroki felt like he was getting closer to his own climax, he once again grabbed Bakugou’s cock and started jerking him off alongside his thrusts. Being pleasured in those two places at the same

time certainly made his hole even tighter, which in turn incited Todoroki into coming even faster. It was such a conflicting conundrum - Todoroki obviously wanted to feel even better, but he also didn't want this to end just yet.

But, in the end, Bakugou's seductive body ended up winning him over. He simply couldn't resist the way he was oh so sweetly and greedily squeezing him any longer. Todoroki gave one last stronger thrust before he finally reached his climax, which turned out to be the right way to end that round of sex, as it also milked one more orgasm out of Bakugou.

Beyond exhausted but very satisfied was the best way to describe how Bakugou felt right now, his come-speckled chest inflating and deflating in quick succession as his body tried to level out his breathing rhythm after such a strenuous activity.

"Are you still alive, Bakugou…?" asked Todoroki after taking a deep breath to even himself out. He didn't have any desire to move and just wanted to continue to enjoy the afterglow of their climax, but he probably should at least 'unmount' himself from Bakugou, for lack of a better term.

"...Either you're really flattering yourself or you have a death wish. Pick your poison," grumbled Bakugou, his face scrunching up with a pouty frown.

"I was just checking," chuckled Todoroki. After getting to see a whole new side of Bakugou, it felt quite nostalgic to be glared at like this. In the end, Bakugou was still Bakugou, whether he was threatening someone because of a simple, well-intentioned question or melting into a pile of lascivious goo. Since he was perfectly capable of barking back at him like this, he had to be just fine.

“Ngh…” Bakugou felt his whole body trembling as Todoroki slowly removed himself from inside him. If he had done so in one go and fast, like removing a bandaid, Bakugou wouldn’t have gotten his innards twisting themselves into butterflies by the unnecessarily dragged-out grinding. Now he was left with an itch he couldn’t very well scratch all on his own… “Hey.”

“Hm? Urgh…!” When Todoroki turned his head back to Bakugou, still only halfway done with tying and disposing of the embarrassingly plump condom, he was greeted by the sole of his foot straight to his face. The kick carried on until Todoroki had fallen backwards and was lying down on his back, and Bakugou was victoriously sitting half on top of him, half on the bed. Once his ‘dear husband’ finally got his foot out of his face, Todoroki rubbed his poor, sore nose while he complained, “Did you really have to kick me like this…?”

“Yeah, well, you should have thought about that before you picked me up like that again,” scoffed Bakugou, the corners of his lips curling into a mischievous, maybe even devilish, smirk.

For someone who had literally just been kicked in the face, Todoroki recovered terrifyingly fast. Perhaps a bit too fast. However, he was all but human, a slave to all of his desires and irresistible urges. A smirk as bewitching as the one Bakugou had on his face would be able to raise the dead, let alone Todoroki’s innocent heartbeat. What other option did he have but to submit and pounce on him once again?

“Wah…!” yelped Bakugou, suddenly finding himself getting pinned down by Todoroki right after he had finally gotten the upper hand. That was so not fair, and he was going to make sure he would be heard for it. “Seriously!?”

“Yeah, well, you should have thought about that before you begged me for more,” said Todoroki, copying word for word what he had just been told. Bakugou obviously did it better, what with that wicked smirk of his, but Todoroki was a very close second, thanks to his

natural good looks and the sheer attraction he felt for the man underneath him.

“Yeah, fuck you too!” spat Bakugou, flipping him the middle finger.

“I’m on it,” acknowledged Todoroki with a stern nod of his head.

“W-Wait! Not like that! Ahh!”

Chapter 24

Todoroki's morning began the same way it started every single day: with the loud sound of his alarm coming from his smartphone.

This time, however, there were some minute differences to his usual wake-up routine. When he groggily placed his hand on his nightstand to turn off the alarm, he found no phone there whatsoever, no matter how much he blindly groped around its surface. That was difference number one.

Difference number two was…

"Ugh… Turn that off…" groaned Bakugou, his voice coming out slightly hoarse. He sluggishly slid his hand towards the pillow and pulled it from under his head, only to then shove it back down and cover himself with it in hopes of muffling the loud alarm sound coming from somewhere in the room.

Still feeling a bit groggy, Todoroki sat up on the bed and looked around his bedroom, trying to figure out where exactly he had left his phone. It turned out to still be in his pants' pocket, which were lying haphazardly on the floor next to the bed. Both he and Bakugou breathed out a sigh of relief when he finally turned his alarm off.

All of that moving around had helped Todoroki's brain wake up a bit more, even though his body still felt somewhat tired. Given the time he had set his alarm for, they probably hadn't slept more than 4 hours, so it was no wonder he felt more sluggish than usual that morning. And it seemed like he wasn't the only one.

"Ahhhh… I don't wanna get up…" groaned Bakugou yet again, barely audible due to the pillow covering his head. His body then slowly

shifted and rolled a bit underneath the bed sheets, until he was lying down on his side. Without a moment of hesitation, he started lightly kicking Todoroki's leg with one of his feet. "And it's all because of you…!"

"Right…" said Todoroki, accepting those whiny complaints without any of his own. It could indeed be said that they were in this precise situation right now because of him and his lack of self-control over his own high libido, although he also felt that Bakugou carried some of the blame, too. After all, he was the one who kept moaning 'more' all night long with such a bewitching appearance that it put the lewdest of porn actors and actresses to shame. Still, Todoroki was the one who had started it all and, as such, he was willing to take on full responsibility over it, even if it came in the form of taking a couple of light kicks. He leaned his upper body a bit closer to Bakugou, in an attempt to visually check on him, and asked, "Are you okay? Are you hurting anywhere? Do you think you can get up?"

"Huh? Who the hell do you think you're talking to!?" hissed Bakugou, promptly yanking the pillow away from his head and revealing his usual frowning face and glaring crimson eyes. The soft and erotic expressions he had shown the previous night nearly seemed to be some sort of delusion when placed next to Bakugou's trademark moodiness. He kicked Todoroki's leg some more while he kept vehemently telling him off. "I got back up and kicked some serious ass after my heart literally exploded! You think your dick is worse than that!?"

"That's… not a fair comparison…" grumbled Todoroki, feeling a bit conflicted over whether he should take that as a compliment and reassurance he hadn't absolutely destroyed Bakugou's back, or as criticism that ranked his sexual prowess as just a bit above injuries taken in battle.

"Don't ask stupid questions if you don't want me to give you mean answers," scoffed Bakugou with a haughty 'hmph', dropping his head back to the pillow.

Yeah, I guess I deserved that one, sighed Todoroki in the back of his mind. Bakugou had a very strong sense of pride and hated being seen as less than other people. Todoroki's questions might have been interpreted as him telling Bakugou that he was weaker than him, so he needed to look after him after they had sex. While he couldn't be 100% sure of it just by looking at him, Bakugou did seem to be fine and with enough energy to bicker with him as usual. That had to mean he was mostly okay, and that Todoroki had nothing to worry about. "Do you want to take a bath before you get dressed?"

"...I'm gonna sleep for 30 more minutes..." mumbled Bakugou, his frown softening a bit as he pulled the bed sheets and covered half of his face with them.

"Didn't you want to leave at 8 so we have enough time to do all of the cleaning at the new apartment before the moving date?" asked Todoroki, an eyebrow slightly arched at Bakugou's surprising declaration. And it wasn't just his words that had caught Todoroki by surprise. The way he was gripping the bed sheets and snuggling up to them as if telling him, 'You better not even think about kicking me off of your bed,' was beyond adorable. If this was what it was like to share a bed with Bakugou, then every single yen he had spent on the new mattress and bed frame was so very worth it.

"Remind me once again whose fault it is that my schedule is getting ruined all over again?" grumbled Bakugou, his gaze tightening into a begrudging glare. "Just wake me up in 30 minutes. Preferably with something other than that annoying alarm ringtone."

"Alright," said Todoroki, chuckling a little bit at how Bakugou promptly turned around and covered himself nearly from head to toes. He grabbed his underwear from the floor, put it back on and then walked up to his closet, from where he grabbed a fresh set of clothes before he left the room, softly closing the door behind himself.

His first stop was the bathroom, so he could take a quick bath too. He wasn't sure if Bakugou would take him up on his offer and take a bath there, or if he'd return to his apartment and take a bath in his own bathroom. However, just to play safe, once he was done, he left the bathtub filled with pleasantly steaming water, ready to be used if Bakugou so chose to.

Next in line was breakfast. Todoroki was absolutely starving after such a physically intensive night. Again, he debated over whether he should make something for Bakugou too or not. He wouldn't be able to cook anything fancy, like a full-on traditional Japanese breakfast, but a cup of coffee he could customise according to his preference, a few slices of toast with butter and maybe even a fried egg wouldn't be beyond his shoddy cooking skills.

By the time Todoroki was done with all of that, 30 minutes had passed by.

Should I really go wake him up? Todoroki wondered to himself, glancing at the closed bedroom door. He was instructed to wake him up after those 30 requested minutes, but part of him was expecting Bakugou to do so on his own, given how fussy he was about his independence and not being ordered around. But no matter how long Todoroki stared at that door, no movement came into sight, and he heard no sound surfacing from behind it either. He waited ten more minutes to give him the benefit of the doubt, but there were still no signs of Bakugou being awake. *Well, I should go in there with the expectation of getting yelled at again, I guess.*

Having no other choice, Todoroki carefully approached his bedroom and opened the door as quietly as he could. He wanted first to know what he was dealing with before he made a concrete move. Since the curtains were closed, there was very little light coming in through the window. The open door became Todoroki's best source of luminosity.

Todoroki almost immediately spotted Bakugou sleeping on his bed,

just like he had been when he left the room. …No, on closer inspection, it wasn't like when he had left. Bakugou was in an entirely new position and location of the bed, with the sheets thrown all over the place, yet still covering the majority of his naked body. The pillow was also now on the floor, rather than on the bed. As for Bakugou… Yes, he was out like a light, no other way to put it. Rather than in the straight lying down position he had been in, Bakugou was now almost perpendicular to it, one of his hands hanging from the side edge of the bed as he used his arm as a replacement for the fallen pillow.

This was exactly the kind of messy sleeping posture that Todoroki was expecting to get while he shared the bed with Bakugou. Since his bed was meant for one adult only, Todoroki wouldn't have been all that surprised if he had gotten kicked or punched out of the bed and down to the floor at some point throughout the night. But against all odds, they had fallen asleep and woken up in the exact same spot, with little to no difference in their posture. Todoroki didn't even remember if he had woken up a single time during those short hours of sleep due to Bakugou stirring around.

He walked up closer to his bed, initially intending to wake Bakugou up as gently as possible. But he couldn't do it. One look at his peaceful sleeping demeanour, and Todoroki was skipping heartbeats and backtracking on his decision to disturb his rest. If Bakugou wanted to oversleep after a night of going at it like crazed bunnies, he had every right to do so. Todoroki's only gripe about it was that he wouldn't be able to join him, at least not without waking him up in the process.

If I knew this would happen, I would have told him I would also sleep for an extra 30 minutes…, grumbled Todoroki in the back of his mind, quietly tiptoeing back outside to the living room area. Once he had silently closed the door, he breathed out a long sigh, both in relief for not having accidentally woken up his 'husband' and to air out his grievances over such a tragically missed opportunity. *If this is what living with Bakugou will be like, then…*

Then, what? Would he be happy about it? Yes, he most certainly would, and he most certainly was already. Todoroki had been looking

forward to it ever since they had made this deal to help one another with their respective problems. The reasons for that were varied and sometimes not even connected. His work as a pro hero kept him away from home for the majority of the day, and he mostly only returned to his apartment to sleep, eat and store his belongings. But with Bakugou around… Todoroki wouldn't be opposed to spending more time at home to have him as his company. Eating breakfast and dinner with him every day also didn't sound that bad. Winding down after a busy day at work and talking about random things seemed like the perfect way to spend an evening together. And, of course, if things ended up going like they did the previous night and they slept together once again… Well, that was a cherry on top that Todoroki saw no reason to refuse.

"Hm? I have the feeling I'm missing something really important right now…" Todoroki mumbled under his breath, arms crossed over his chest as he tilted his head. He carefully recited that list of things he was looking forward to enjoying with Bakugou a second time, diving just a bit deeper into each entry to try to figure out what he was overlooking.

The moment it finally occurred to him what he was missing, Todoroki's entire body went as straight as an arrow, his mismatched eyes opening just a little bit wider.

"How could I miss something as big and important as this…?" sighed Todoroki, admonishing himself over his silly ignorance. It was common for him to miss the little details, but *this*? It was no wonder Bakugou kept calling him 'dense' and a 'half-ass'. "Didn't we already talk about using the balcony as our new training ground? That's one of the biggest improvements we'll get out of this partnership. Haa… If I'm missing something this obvious, then I think I could still use one more cup of coffee…"

Todoroki quietly pitter-pattered to the kitchen and filled his mug with a bit more of the coffee he had brewed. He used his right hand to lower the temperature of the piping hot, fragrant liquid in the cup as he walked to one of the piles of cardboard boxes.

Since Bakugou was still getting his ‘beauty sleep’, Todoroki might as well continue with his packing until he finally woke up on his own. Only a few more things were left to be stored away, and half of them could only go inside a box on the day of the move itself, as Todoroki needed them in his day-to-day. That suited him just fine. He didn’t want to risk being too noisy and waking up Bakugou by accident. He took a seat on the floor cross-legged next to the boxes he was packing when he got an unexpected visit from his ‘husband’, steaming coffee mug next to him. Slowly but surely, Todoroki carefully placed his belongings on the empty boxes, trying his best not to clank them against each other too often.

He was already on his 3rd box of the day when his smartphone started ringing. He grabbed the electronic device from his back pocket in a rush, inwardly cursing at the loud noise, and answered it without even first checking who it was.

“Hel-”

“SHOUTOOOOOOOOOOOOO!” screamed Enji as soon as his son’s voice reached his ear. Conversely, Todoroki had to pull the smartphone away from his ear to keep his father’s loud screech from damaging his eardrums. *“What have you done!? You legally married him!? What were you even thinking!?”*

“Isn’t that what I’ve been telling you since last week?” deadpanned Todoroki, already regretting having answered.

He could pretty much guess what had happened for him to receive this panicked phone call from Enji: the paperwork regarding their marriage had been delivered. Because of their move, Todoroki wrote down his hero agency’s address rather than his own, just to play safe. With him being away on his ‘honeymoon’, his father must have been the one who received the letter, and, maybe confusing it with a

delivery for himself, he opened and read it. Since those documents were the official version of his marriage certificate, rather than a copy, Enji was confronted with reality and had no other option but to admit that his son had truly gotten married to another man behind his back.

"Yes, but I was 99.9999% sure that it was just a bluff and you hadn't really gone through with it in an official sense!" roared Enji, a bit of anger melting into his flustered dialogue. *"There's no way the two of you have been dating for years without my knowledge! I'll admit, you did a good job roping in all of these people as your witnesses, but there's only so much you can do with a lie this obvious! And yet… yet… Just how!? How exactly did you convince Bakugou, out of everyone that you could have dragged into this childish family feud, to get legally married to you!?"*

"We obviously got married because we've been dating this whole time," sighed Todoroki after taking a long sip from his nearly cold cup of coffee. "But you said it well. Bakugou isn't the type to go along with those sorts of childish family feuds, as you called it. So I really don't understand why you're still doubting us."

"That's beside the point, Shouto! We're talking about an official, legally binding marriage here! Do you realise how serious that is?" admonished Enji, awkwardly doing his best to sound authoritative without coming off as unreasonable and bigoted - both of which he was failing miserably, as far as Todoroki was concerned. *"If you go back to the court right this moment, you might be able to get it annulled. So stop screwing around, go get Bakugou and drive there right this moment!"*

"Why would I do that?" asked Todoroki while rolling his eyes at his father's hissy fit. "We publicly announced our marriage just yesterday. Don't you think it would be really bad if we got it annulled a day later?"

"Yes, it's going to be bad for both of you. But it's still better to admit to this lie right now than weeks or months after the fact! The longer you keep

deceiving the whole world, the worse the consequences will be!" Enji explained, clearly feeling extremely frustrated by this whole ordeal. *"You've made your point already, so hurry up and get that sham of a marriage annulled already! We can discuss the details about finding you a suitable partner afterwards."*

"No," denied Todoroki almost right away, his voice firm and unrelenting. He obviously knew it wouldn't be easy to convince and fool his father, but hearing him telling him to end his marriage with Bakugou and basically trade him in with someone else had annoyed him way more than he thought it would, hence his extremely blunt and straight-to-the-point response to it. "What do you even mean by a 'suitable partner' in the first place?"

"Isn't it obvious? I want you to be with someone who adds value to your life and makes the burdens you carry easier to shoulder," tiredly sighed Enji. *"You should know by now that being a pro hero isn't easy, both physically and mentally. Behind every successful hero is a strong, loyal support system. And no, it's not just a matter of having someone who cooks, cleans and provides emotional support. If it were just that, hiring a chef, a housekeeper and a therapist would be much more straightforward and efficient. It has to be someone who is all of those things, combined with an unmovable presence that will always be there, waiting for you to come home alive, no matter how challenging the fight that day might be. That's why you need to be very careful with the 'someone' that you pick. The wrong support system might be what drives a hero to an early grave. We, as a family, should know that fact better than anyone else…"*

"....." He didn't want to admit it out loud, but Todoroki did understand and, in a roundabout way, agree with what his father was saying. Having the support of their loved ones could make or break a hero. His older brother, Touya - more famously known as villain Dabi -, was the perfect example of that: he did not have the needed support of his family to pursue his dreams and fulfil his life goal of becoming a hero in a safe way, and, as a result, entered a self-destructive, all-consuming war path that nearly burned down the whole country to ashes. Todoroki would never go down that same path, but that didn't mean things wouldn't go sideways if the pressure and responsibility of protecting the country and its people were to drive him to a breaking

point.

“So, Shouto, just give a rest to this tantrum you’re having,” continued Enji, having at long last returned to his usual composure after that long-winded exposition. *“Get your marriage annulled. And if that’s not possible, just get divorced. We’ll find a way to deal with the absolute shitshow of a scandal that will come afterwards. I mean, it’s not like you two would be able to fool anyone who is of any use for anything in the first place. It’s pretty obvious you’re not dating, nor will you ever date. Your little scheme has failed. Give it up, get separated and back to what you used to be with Bakugou, and get a move on with a proper marriage to a suitable partner.”*

“…Fine,” said Todoroki, his hand gripping his smartphone more strongly. He already knew this would happen. This was simply how his father was, as a person. He was a stubborn old man who would not relent in matters related to Todoroki’s pro hero career, directly or indirectly. It was something Todoroki was fully aware would happen when he decided to pursue the same field and position as his father. However, that did not mean he would allow Enji to have his way with his life, choices and future. “I’ll get divorced from Bakugou.”

“Heh, that’s exactly what I wanted to he-”

“But only if you can find someone who is more suitable for the role of my partner than he is,” added Todoroki before his father could go on with rubbing his ‘victory’ all over his face.

“……..What?” Enji somehow managed to croak, despite being utterly flabbergasted by what he had just heard.

“I’ll divorce Bakugou if you can find someone who is better and more skilled than he is,” reiterated Todoroki, wanting to make sure the right message was transmitted. “It needs to be someone who cooks better

than he does, has mastered all house chores better than he has, has the same interests as me and gets along with me better than he does, and can keep up with my training pace for just as long as he can."

"What!?" yelped Enji, a loud crashing sound following right afterwards. By the sound it had made, he had probably slammed his prosthetic hand against his desk or something along those lines. *"That's simply-"*

"Impossible, right?" Todoroki cut him off once again, knowing full well what his father was about to say next. "I guess that just means Bakugou is the person I'm destined to get married to, then."

"Grrr…" Some clattering and clanking sounds ensued on the other end of the phone call. By the looks of it, Enji wasn't yet ready to accept his defeat, whether temporarily or permanently. A loud thumping sound, followed by the rustling of pages being turned in quick succession, came next. *"I have right here a young lady of the same age as you, heiress to a famous traditional inn in the Kyoto region. She can cook, she can clean, she can do everything you'd expect of someone running a successful inn of very high calibre. She is also very athletic and a passionate supporter of pro heroes. There can't be anyone more suitable than-"*

"Oh, I almost forgot. They also have to be as physically compatible as Bakugou and I are," added Todoroki, cutting off his father for the third time. No matter how stubborn Enji might be, he would not allow him to win in this matter. He would not allow him to be the decisive factor in who he got married to or who he would be able to date or not. Todoroki had made up his mind about that a long time ago, and these past few days he had spent with Bakugou only cemented that even further. He was committed to seeing through with their 'mission' no matter what, not only for his sake but also Bakugou's. And for that, he was willing to do anything, no matter how low a blow he might have to deal. "Just so there aren't any misunderstandings, when I say 'physically compatible', I'm talking about sex."

“W-W-Wha-...!? You… Y-You two…” stammered Enji, his voice even cracking once or twice.

“Why do you sound so surprised?” deadpanned Todoroki, taking hold of this crack in his father’s plan as soon as he realised it was something he could weaponise against him. “Of course we’ve already consummated our marriage. Isn’t that what’s expected of a newlywed couple? We’re even on our honeymoon right now.”

“Are… Are you two… really… d-dating…?” Enji stuttered hesitantly, so choked up by shock that his once strong, menacing voice was nothing more than a whisper now.

“You still have doubts about us?” sighed Todoroki, his words unintentionally coming out in a monotone, perhaps because of the daring move he was trying to pull on impulse, perhaps because he was that bad at telling lies. “Will I have to give you a play-by-play of what we were doing last night for you to believe me?”

“.....W-We’ll continue this conversation at a later time. Goodbye for now,” suddenly announced Enji, right before he hurriedly but clumsily ended the phone call.

Only once he heard absolute silence for a handful of seconds did Todoroki let the hand holding his smartphone fall back down to his lap, that slow movement accompanied by an even longer sigh.

He won. There was no doubt Todoroki had won this confrontation with his father. But on the other hand…

“Bakugou is going to kill all three of us if he ever finds out I told my father about us having sex…” sighed Todoroki while he slowly rubbed his aching temples. He could only thank the gods that his father

withdrew almost right away and that he did not have to actually give him a play-by-play of their ‘nuptial night’.

He might have won this battle against his father, but Todoroki could very well be dangerously close to being banned from having sex with Bakugou for the rest of his life. And *that* was the type of terrifying future he’d like to avoid at all costs… or so his subconscious was telling him.

Chapter 25

Chapter Notes

> Hello, everyone!
> I just wanted to quickly send my appreciation to all of you. I might not respond all that frequently, but be sure that I read every single one of your comments and fangirl and laugh alongside you. You always make my day with the things you write, so it's only fair I try my best to make your week just a tiny little bit better with TodoBaku shenanigans!
> I hope every single one of you has a great start to your week, whether it's sunny and warm or grey and rainy. Keep on doing the best you can, you're doing great <3

When Bakugou opened his eyes for the second time that morning, he found himself in a completely silent room this time around. He had such a great bonus nap that it took him a handful of seconds to remember he wasn't sleeping in his bedroom but instead on Todoroki's bed.

"...What time is it?" mumbled Bakugou, sluggishly looking around his surroundings after sitting up. He had told Todoroki to wake him up 30 minutes after his alarm had gone off, but by the little bit of sunlight leaking through the closed curtains, Bakugou could tell that way more time than that had passed. He clicked his tongue and cursed under his breath, "...I'm gonna kill that fuckin' half-assed bastard…"

Bakugou crawled his way out of the bed, dragging the bed sheets along with him so he could cover his naked body while he looked around for his clothes… which were apparently nowhere to be seen. That got him to remember he had been fully undressed way before he was carried to the bedroom, much to his flustered annoyance.

No, seriously, I'm gonna fuckin' kill him, I swear, Bakugou continued grumbling in the back of his mind, adjusting the position of the bed sheet and wrapping himself better with it. Even though he was fairly tall, only wrapping the bed sheet around his waist created a big train

of fabric that dragged against the floor all around him. To save himself from a possible tripping hazard, he grabbed that portion of the bed sheets and draped them over his head and shoulders. That also freed up his hands, which he could now use to beat Todoroki's ass.

With a more proper appearance acquired, Bakugou stomped towards the bedroom door and opened it with the intensity of a hurricane. He didn't even have to look around the living room area before he found Todoroki sitting on the floor amongst several half-packed cardboard boxes.

"I told you to wake me up after 30 minutes…" said Bakugou the moment he made eye contact with Todoroki, his voice sounding as moody as his frowning features.

"You were sleeping so peacefully that I couldn't bring myself to do it," explained Todoroki, promptly setting aside the item he was storing inside one of the boxes so he could get up and walk up to Bakugou. "I know that must have messed up our schedule, but thanks to it, I'm now pretty much done with the packing. Only a few essential things are left."

"You might as well be productive with that extra time if you're gonna wreck *my* schedule with it…" grumbled Bakugou, his frown gaining a sulking edge to it for being forced to approve of Todoroki's choice. Had he been lazing around instead of packing, he would have definitely strangled him right there and then… "Where are my clothes?"

"Here." As soon as that question left Bakugou's vocal cords, Todoroki immediately leaned closer to the sofa and picked up the clothes he had clumsily folded while he was organising his belongings. He gave them to Bakugou at the same time he delivered a few more tidbits of information. "I left the bathtub ready in case you want to take a bath before you get dressed. My bathroom should be the same as yours, so I'm sure you know your way around it."

“Hmph! How accommodating of you,” scoffed Bakugou with a twinge of sarcasm. He wanted to move on to the bathroom, but the way Todoroki was looking at him, like he still hadn’t said everything he wanted to say, kept him stuck in the same spot. “What?”

“Oh… I was just thinking that you being all wrapped up in the white bed sheets like that makes you look like a proper bride,” explained Todoroki, since it looked like Bakugou wanted to hear what was crossing through his mind. There were a few other things he would have liked to say out loud, but he was still uncertain if he should say it and, if so, how to say it.

“…The only reason I didn’t punch you in the face instantly for that one is the clothes I’m holding and this very same bed sheet that I don’t want to fall off of me,” grumbled Bakugou, his frowning pouty face becoming even more creased and slightly redder. “Because I, for sure, will never make the mistake of getting naked while around you ever again!”

“For some reason, I highly doubt that,” deadpanned Todoroki, even though he actually wanted to chuckle at Bakugou’s begrudging, half-hearted threats. With them just about to start living under the same roof, avoiding being seen naked by one another seemed like an impossible standard to keep long-term. Of course, Todoroki felt that way in the most innocent sense possible, even if there was an underlying sexual connotation to it.

“Don’t try me,” warned Bakugou while giving a light kick to Todoroki’s shin. He was petty enough to turn that into a lifelong goal of his, no matter how troublesome it might become. In his own way, Todoroki was probably also aware of that, which was why his next words announced the end of that bickering match.

“I literally did so last night,” said Todoroki, his suggestive remark

contrasting immensely with his calm, collected expressionless demeanour. It was one of his rare moments of perfect clarity in a conversation that would have otherwise concluded with him backing away to not gain Bakugou's wrath. Instead, he gained one more accentuated blushing expression.

"T-That's not what I- Argh, whatever!" groaned Bakugou as he turned around and scurried to the bathroom in a hurry, his feet loudly thumping on the wooden floor. Before he slammed the door shut behind himself, Bakugou made question to turn back around and stick his tongue out at Todoroki.

He's still so childish at times, chuckled Todoroki in the back of his mind, his stony expression melting into something softer for a brief moment. Once he started hearing the muffled sound of the shower head running, he made a beeline to the kitchen and got down to business.

By the time Bakugou was done with his bath and at long last fully clothed once again, a simple but not too shabby breakfast made out of toasts, a fried egg and coffee awaited him on the kitchen counter (Todoroki's dining table had already been disassembled at this point).

"'The heck? Were you kidnapped by aliens and replaced with a clone or something?" Such were Bakugou's first words once he saw the food on the counter and the expressionlessly proud Todoroki standing right next to it, very obviously seeking his approval and maybe even an 'I guess you can cook without burning down the kitchen after all' as a pat on the back.

"I can do it well when I try," declared Todoroki, making way for Bakugou to get to his breakfast.

"Yeah, and that only makes your half-assing tendency even more aggravating," scoffed Bakugou while he rolled his eyes at Todoroki.

He nevertheless accepted the food offering. He was absolutely famished, after not eating anything since dinner the previous day and that physically intensive night. That light breakfast wouldn't fully satiate his hunger, but it would be a good buffer until he got back to his apartment.

"I mean, I could do my best all the time, but that just sounds like a pain in the ass," deadpanned Todoroki, calmly watching from close by as Bakugou began begrudgingly eating the food he had prepared for him. "Unlike you, I don't feel the need to win at every little thing that I do. I save it for the really important stuff."

"Yeah, yeah, whatever makes you sleep better at night," sighed Bakugou, waving his hand around dismissively. He grabbed the fork and used it to break the runny yolk of the fried egg, which he used as a dip for a drier chunk of his toast. Obviously, a certain someone had forgotten to season the egg. But well, this was Todoroki they were talking about here, so Bakugou had already expected it to go in that direction the moment he decided to eat that breakfast.

A silent lull followed, with just the clink and clatter of cutlery cutting and moving around. That gave Todoroki the chance to reevaluate once again whether he should tell Bakugou a certain something or not. There were endless reasons not to and only one in favour, but that single favourable reason was substantial enough to give it a bigger advantage. After much mulling, Todoroki ended up concluding that not saying anything now would most likely get him into bigger trouble down the line. That spelt the end of his conflicted musings.

"Bakugou," started Todoroki after heaving a small sigh. The way Bakugou's eyes promptly homed in on him got him feeling slightly more restless but also more certain that this was the right decision. "I've been debating about whether I should tell you this or not, but I think if we want to complete this mission successfully, we'll have to maintain a certain degree of honesty and cooperation with one another."

“God damnit, what have you done this time?” groaned Bakugou, slamming the fork against the plate. Well, there went his voracious hunger… “Out with it! What sort of trouble have you dragged me into?”

“I wouldn’t necessarily call it ‘trouble’…” said Todoroki, his words unconsciously dancing around the subject rather than diving straight into it. Only a ‘if you don’t start speaking right now, I will beat it out of you’ glare got him finally clearing his throat and moving on with his confession time. “My father called me a while ago. It seems our marriage certificate and other official documents have been delivered to my hero agency. Since I wasn’t around, my father ended up opening the letter, though I’m not sure if it was by accident or if he was snooping around.”

“And?” Bakugou urged him on, wanting to get over with the fluff so he could finally discern how much damage control awaited him.

“The good news is that he has finally acknowledged we are truly married,” sighed Todoroki, his voice not sounding all that happy about said ‘good’ news. “The bad news is that he’s demanding we get our marriage annulled ASAP. If we can’t annul it, he wants us to get divorced. He’s fully aware that would create a huge scandal, but he thinks it’s better to have that happen now than to get outed as liars several weeks or months down the line.”

“So in other words, water is wet and your father is a freaking headache to deal with. How is any of that good or bad news? It’s just his normal!” scoffed Bakugou, inwardly breathing out a sigh of relief. None of the several worst-case scenarios he had been imagining turned out to be the catastrophic update Todoroki wanted to tell him.

“The problem is that he’s still demanding I get married to a more suitable partner once we get forcibly divorced…” explained Todoroki, his posture deflating slightly at the mere fact that he had to say something like that out loud. “I asked him what he meant by a

‘suitable partner’, and he went on and on about this huge list of demands and requirements. He seems to have this really restrictive and precise image of what constitutes the ‘perfect bride’ for me.”

“Sounds about right for a micromanager like him,” pointed out Bakugou while shrugging his shoulders dismissively.

“Yeah. Since he kept on making more and more demands without listening to a single thing I was saying, I kinda ended up giving up on trying to reason with him,” acknowledged Todoroki, completely in agreement with Bakugou’s quick snide comment. “So I just agreed with him and told him I’d divorce you.”

“What!?” yelped Bakugou, the piece of toast he was about to plop in his mouth falling to the kitchen counter. That was the last thing he was expecting to hear from Todoroki, given that he was the one who had come up with this ridiculous fake marriage plan in the first place.

“Obviously, I laid out an impossible-to-meet condition for that to happen,” deadpanned Todoroki, quickly reassuring Bakugou that he was not cancelling their deal in any form or shape. “I told him I’d only divorce you if he could find someone better than you. So someone who cooks better than you, cleans better than you, gets along with me better than you do, and so on. That got him panicking a bit and flipping through his huge list of ‘bride candidates’. He got sort of close to that ‘ideal bride’ with one of the women in the list, as far as he’s concerned, but I one-upped him by adding one last condition.”

“...Which was?” asked Bakugou, his eyes narrowing with suspicion. His sixth sense was telling him that whatever condition that was, he would now have credible grounds to legally murder someone.

“I told him they have to be more physically compatible than we are,” declared Todoroki, coming out clean about his ‘sins’ like he was

quickly ripping out a bandaid. Bakugou didn't really seem to catch on with what that meant, the way he was silently staring at him with an eyebrow slightly arched. Todoroki had no choice but to be as clear as he had been with his father. "When I say 'physically compatible', I'm talking about sex."

"....."

"Basically, he knows we've already consummated our marriage," added Todoroki next, for the sake of total clarity and full transparency.

"You are so dead. You are deader than any dead! Are you out of your fuckin' mind!?" yelped Bakugou, his face going sickly pale right before it exploded into a bright red blush. "Why would you say something like that to your own father!? Who the hell would share updates about their sex life with their parents!? Never mind freaking out, he's about to go berserk! You just made everything so much worse for us, and for what? To brag about how you got laid!? Argh, this is why I can't stand morons, let alone DENSE MORONS!"

"Actually, that got him questioning if we've truly been dating behind his back this whole time, so I think it might have been a brilliant move on my behalf," deadpanned Todoroki, keeping his calm intact despite Bakugou's justified crashout.

"A brilliant move would be to end your miserable existence right this moment!" Bakugou hissed in retaliation, banging his fist on the kitchen counter with each word he spat out.

"No, really, having sex last night might have been the best decision we've made so far. It shut up my father instantly, which is a first for him," reassured Todoroki, trying his best (in his own dense way) to calm down his 'husband'. "If we keep this up, we might really

convince him we've been secretly dating since we graduated. And once that happens, he will no longer have any grounds to make any demands regarding a new marriage with someone else, let alone get us to divorce."

"Sorry to burst your delusional bubble, but I think you're forgetting about a pretty darn crucial detail about our current plan," groaned Bakugou, his sizzling face scrunching up a bit more, all thanks to Todoroki's boastful declamation. His frown doubled in intensity and annoyance when he saw Todoroki tilting his head in puzzlement. "Once we're done with both ends of our deal, we're meant to get divorced."

"Ah…!" gasped Todoroki, his mouth hanging slightly open for the couple of seconds that it took for his brain to process that information. "I… didn't think about that part… If I get divorced from you now or in the future, my father will definitely try to get me married to someone else, and this time with someone of his choosing… Maybe we-"

"If you're about to say, 'maybe we should stay married until he dies' or something along those lines, I swear I'll make you sleep on the balcony until the very last day of our marriage," interrupted Bakugou, his moody but extremely serious facial expression hinting that he had 100% meant what he had just said.

"What else am I supposed to do, then?" sighed Todoroki, his shoulders dropping downwards once again. "I don't think my father will ever give up on this issue. For some reason, he's really dead set on getting me married the way he wants to, even if it's something that goes against my wishes. He might say he'll give up to keep the peace, but the moment we end our deal, he'll go right back at it…"

"How about you think a little bit about why he's even doing all of this in the first place?" suggested Bakugou after inwardly heaving a long, tired sigh. Nothing cooled him down faster than seeing Todoroki

acting like a puppy that had just been kicked and abandoned by its owner - something he would never admit to for as long as he was alive, no way, no how.

"Isn't it because he has a never-ending hunger for absolute control over my future as a pro hero?" pointed out Todoroki, his expressionless demeanour nearly screaming, 'Isn't that more than obvious?' "He got a little bit better after I started attending UA, but he's been at it since the day I was born. I guess he views me as his second chance at doing and accomplishing what he could never do and accomplish on his own."

"Well, look who's not *that* terminally dense after all," scoffed Bakugou as he crossed his arms over his chest and leaned his hips on the kitchen counter. "Yeah, that's exactly it. He has always lived vicariously through you, as a cope for everything he couldn't do or made a mess out of. He wants you to follow the family tradition regarding marriages, but instead of making it a Quirk arranged marriage like the one he had, he wants to find you a proper support system, not just a convenient womb to pop out a bunch of brats that might surpass you in the pro hero industry one day. He's also giving you the choice of picking one of the 'bride candidates' on your own, instead of making it an unilateral decision. All of this is meant to put you in the same position he was in, while also making sure you don't end up like him."

"Yeah, I guess that's one way to put it…" acknowledged Todoroki with a small nod of his head. Bakugou's interpretation of the root cause of their family feud was most likely correct - Enji was unable to let go of the past mistakes he was still trying to atone for, which compelled him to act very stubbornly and selfishly in certain regards. The fact that Todoroki was his last shot at finally getting the ideal version of the arranged marriage he never got to have with Rei, his wife, only made him more irrationally desperate. Convincing someone that frantic and obstinate to give up on that 'dream' was an extremely hard and draining task, especially without blowing up their new peaceful status quo in the process…

“How you go about your side of our deal isn’t up for me to decide, so you’ll have to find a way out of that on your own,” said Bakugou, finally picking up his fork once again so he could finish eating his breakfast. “But if I were you, I’d find a way to convince him that you can have a different but even better support system while foregoing all marriage talks. Loads of pro heroes never get married, and they do their thing just fine on their own. All Might is a good example of that. He’s only stuck on the idea of you getting married because that’s what he did too and now he wants to emulate that through you.”

“I already told him all of that, though. It didn’t lead anywhere,” sighed Todoroki, recalling one of the several discussions he had had with his father regarding his arranged marriage.

“Yeah, because you were being all talk and no action,” snorted Bakugou right before he popped that fallen piece of toast into his mouth. “You need to live that life to make him believe your words.”

“Hmm… I suppose you’re right,” acknowledged Todoroki after briefly reflecting on what Bakugou had just said. Thinking back, he could see how some of his shortcomings regarding living on his own might have influenced his father into concluding that he would be better off marrying someone who could support him from behind the scenes while he focused on being a pro hero full-time.

Todoroki never had any problems, challenges or setbacks due to living independently from his family, so he had convinced himself he was doing just fine all on his own. But that was only possible because he offloaded quite a lot of things on other people. He hardly ever cooked on his own and depended on take-out or on food cooked by either his mother or his sister. He didn’t spend all that much time at home, so it never reached a chaotic state, but his sister often visited him whenever their days off matched and helped him around the house with several chores. He managed his money and paid the bills on his own, but it was his brother who had helped him set up a mostly automatic payment process so he wouldn’t even have to think about when he needed to pay what amidst his ever-changing pro hero work schedule. All in all, he only lived alone as well and freely as he did

because a whole group of people were providing him with constant backup from backstage.

Enji obviously was aware of all of that. After evaluating the entire situation and how unsustainable it would be long-term, he had decided that it would be for the best if Todoroki got married to someone who would be able to take over all of those tasks, plus help him out with several other things that would always be outside of the scope of family members.

“Anyway, just think about it real good and hard. Also, for fuck’s sake, stop sharing too much information with random people,” sighed Bakugou, a bit satisfied that Todoroki seemed to be properly considering all of that.

“I didn’t do it on purpose or by accident. I was forced to reveal that piece of information or else he’d find a way to drag us all the way to the courthouse so he could witness us getting divorced or something,” grumbled Todoroki in an attempt to justify his prior actions. It was a wholly unavoidable situation, in his honest opinion. What one would call ‘an act of god’, even. “That would have derailed your schedule even more, right?”

“You’re the last person I want to hear that from,” Bakugou snapped back, his eyebrow twitching out of repressed anger. He stuffed some more of the (unsalted) fried egg into his mouth and grumbled while chewing, “This bs needs to end here. No more sudden changes of plan, no more delaying this or that, and no more moving things around to a different day. We’re following the rest of my schedule as is, down to a T, until we’re done moving. Are we clear!?”

“I’m on board with that, but I can’t control what other people might or might not do,” pointed out Todoroki. The way Bakugou was so fussy about his schedule was so amusing that he couldn’t even get mad at the mess it had become in just two days - the only exception to that was when they were interrupted by someone while they were

having a moment, but he might have already found a way to prevent that from happening from now on. It was perhaps because his train of thought had gone towards such a skeevy area that he ended up blurting out his next few words. “I also can’t control whatever might happen between us.”

“Oh, yeah? Good thing I already said I ain’t getting naked around you ever again, you sleazebag,” hissed Bakugou, slamming the fork on the plate once again, this time for being fully done with that half-baked breakfast. “Don’t think that being married to and living under the same roof as me will give you access to what’s inside my pants! What happened last night was the first and last time! We are never, ever sleeping together again! For the sake of our mission, I’ll tolerate things up to 2nd base, but anything else above that is a no-go! So you'd better learn to control yourself, or else you’ll be finding out what cats and dogs go through when they get castrated! Also, while you’re at it, forget about it! Wipe it all out from your memory. If you can’t do it on your own, I will volunteer to hit you until you develop amnesia!”

“Don’t ask for the impossible,” deadpanned Todoroki, inwardly sighing at Bakugou’s unreasonable demands. There was no way he’d be able to forget about what happened last night. Those were the sort of memories that got ingrained in one’s very own body and soul, whether intentionally or otherwise. “Plus, telling me that kissing and touching are okay, but anything more than that isn’t, is just… beyond impossible and unreasonable. You’re too good at seducing me, Bakugou.”

“D-Don’t try to make that my fault!” yelped Bakugou, getting just a tiny, tiny little bit flustered due to the words of the one being truly unreasonable here. “You’re the one with self-control issues. If you hadn’t kissed me back then, none of that would have happened!”

“But that was your fault too,” pointed out Todoroki, head slightly cocked to the side as he happily added Bakugou’s current blushing expression to his growing memory collection. If Bakugou hadn’t smiled so adorably while he was looking at the collectable card, he wouldn’t have impulsively kissed him. Likewise, if Bakugou hadn’t

kissed him while they were talking with Enji right after they got married, Todoroki also wouldn't have come up with such a clever way to prove their 'relationship' and improve their acting skills as a 'couple'. To sum it up, Bakugou was the true culprit behind all of that.

"How!?" growled Bakugou, unwilling to lose that extremely unfair fight. Not even over his cold, dead body would he take the blame for something that very obviously was not his fault.

"How, you ask…" mumbled Todoroki, not entirely sure how he was supposed to explain something that not even he fully understood. He lifted his hand and softly touched Bakugou's neck with the pads of his fingers. His soft skin flinched a little bit at the sudden physical contact, which only grew more accentuated as he slid his fingers from one of the visible hickeys on his neck to another. The resulting reaction got Todoroki reflexively swallowing in a dry throat. "You're doing it right now."

"I'm doing what?" Bakugou grumbled in complaint, the reddish glow on his cheekbones becoming more accentuated the worse his pouting got. He lightly slapped the back of Todoroki's hand a couple of times, wanting it moved away from his neck post-haste, but didn't go as far as to grab it or push it away forcibly.

"This," simply said Todoroki, much to Bakugou's utter confusion. Out of the blue, he pulled his fingers away from his neck and instead grabbed his face with both hands, using a bit too much strength that got his cheeks and lips all squished. That alone fully sank in why Bakugou liked to pinch his cheeks so much a second time. "You're being all cute one moment and then get all lewd the next. If you want me to control myself, you also need to learn to control this."

"Huh!? Y-You're making zero sense right now!" stammered Bakugou, his cheeks getting exponentially hotter - Todoroki must have been using his fire Quirk on him or something, that was the only plausible explanation for such an unusual bodily reaction. With that came a

light sensation of panic, which obviously explained why his heartbeat spiked as soon as Todoroki grabbed him. “Wait, who the hell are you calling lewd!?”

“It’s true, you *are* lewd, even when you’re trying to act all menacing and threatening. Like right now,” Todoroki reiterated with a very serious and solemn expression on his face. “You need to be more careful, Bakugou. You attract villains and weirdos to you like a moth to the flame. With how easy you are, you will end up in big, big trouble if you ever get cornered by the wrong person.”

“WHO’S EASY, YOU FUCKING ASSHOLE!?” roared Bakugou, his blush gone and replaced with the most demonic expression a human being had ever been able to muster in a moment of pure rage. In a split second, he was shoving an explosion straight at Todoroki’s face, which was promptly followed by a quick but deadly elbow strike at his solar plexus. To finish it off, he swept Todoroki’s legs from under him with his foot and tripped him up.

In a matter of three seconds, one per move, Todoroki was down on the floor, groaning at his throbbing stomach area.

“Who’s easy now, huh?” Bakugou snarled before he turned around and stomped his way outside of Todoroki’s apartment. Before he slammed the door shut behind himself, he yelled loud and clear, “You have thirty minutes to get your shit together! If you’re one minute late, I will be the one dragging you to the courthouse to end this stupid marriage! Drop dead! Idiot! Hmph!”

The booming sound of the door closing completely drowned Todoroki’s weak ‘Okay…’

Chapter 26

I think… I've really messed up…, sighed Todoroki in the back of his mind as he was made to withstand possibly the awkwardest elevator ride of his entire life.

It took a while, but Todoroki recovered from the sudden strike after Bakugou stormed out of his apartment. His pissed off 'husband' might not have hit him at full strength, but Todoroki now had one nasty bruise on his torso that would most likely stick around for a good week or maybe even longer. It wasn't going to interfere with his pro hero duties or unofficial mission, that was obvious. However, the message behind it was passed down loud and clear.

Bakugou was truly fuming mad at him.

Todoroki couldn't tell whether it was an accumulation of little and big things that eventually boiled over in such a violent outburst, or if he had angered him that badly by calling him 'easy'. But one thing was certain: Todoroki was now walking on a really thin line that could collapse at the smallest of mistakes.

So with that in mind, he left his apartment when there were only a handful of minutes left and then parked himself right in front of Bakugou's front door. He intended to be punctual to a fault and knock on his door at the precise moment the demanded 30 minutes ran out. That surely would please Bakugou and quell some of his anger, right?

Well, not really…

As soon as the 30-minute intermission ended and Todoroki was lifting his hand to knock, the front door was opened, and a bucket filled with several cleaning items was shoved towards him, hitting Todoroki

squarely on his bruised torso. The same menacing look he had had while storming out was still present on Bakugou's face. He used the bucket to push Todoroki out of the way without having to directly touch him and locked his door without saying a single peep. Then he turned around and stomped towards the elevator, also carrying some more cleaning supplies with him.

The elevator trip to the ground floor was silent, tense and awkward. Todoroki had no idea how he was supposed to break that type of silence, so he kept his mouth shut. He had this impression that he should ask others for clarification whenever he was confused by something, but this definitely didn't seem like the type of situation where he could apply that rule without starting one more argument. It was all very worrying, but what else could Todoroki do? An apology wouldn't cut it, that he knew for sure. With that in mind, what should he do to patch things up between them?

"...What should we do about the journalists and paparazzi outside...?" mumbled Todoroki under his breath the moment he stepped outside of the elevator and saw the same group of people still setting camp outside of their apartment complex. The moment they got spotted, the group excitedly readied their cameras and recording devices. That was the last thing they needed, with Bakugou already in the bad mood that he was in.

"Get rid of them, that's what we'll do..." grumbled Bakugou, his already frowning features getting more rugged. As soon as he opened the apartment complex's front door, blinding camera flashes and a cacophony of questions imploded right before his eyes. Bakugou groaned, visibly fed up with that cliché reception. "You guys sure don't know when to give up..."

"What are your plans for today?" "Did Dynamight spend the night at Shouto's apartment!?" "Will you be working together more frequently now that you are married?" "Shouto's social media presence has been booming recently. Is that thanks to revealing your relationship?" "Can we expect Dynamight to officially join Endeavor's hero agency in the near future?" "Are you about to go on another date?"

The questions kept coming left and right, rapid-fire style. Bakugou got visibly irritated at it, but Todoroki remained as calm as usual - though only because he had no idea which question he was supposed to answer first. Ultimately, he ended up leaning more toward picking the last question, if only so Bakugou wouldn't have to deal with them personally.

"We're just going to get our new apartment ready for the move," explained Todoroki while showing the bucket of cleaning supplies he was currently carrying. He thought that was a pretty tame and boring response, but most of the reporters' and paparazzi's eyes now shone with glee at hearing such an interesting piece of information.

"Way to go. Now it's guaranteed they'll be following us around the whole day," groaned Bakugou, having to do his very best not to hit his idiot 'husband' with one of the bottles of cleaning products while in front of all of those cameras. Instead, he grabbed Todoroki's free hand and started pulling away from the hungry hyenas, even though he knew they would stalk them all the way to the parking lot where they had been keeping the borrowed vehicle for the night.

"Isn't that how it's supposed to go?" asked Todoroki once there was a considerable gap between them and the group of 'professional stalkers', as Bakugou usually called them.

"I'm not in the mood to deal with their stupid shenanigans…" grumbled Bakugou, sort of regretting having goaded the reporters and journalists into trying to find out their new address during their press conference. It had happened for a very good reason - to make sure the news of their fake marriage reached every single member of the villain group headhunting him - but it was far too annoying for someone who had been able to stay clear from them since the day he joined the pro hero workforce. Bakugou sighed as he adjusted the hoodie jacket he had put on over his t-shirt, covering as much of his neck as he could in that sweltering summer weather. *Haa… The moment those photos they just took hit the internet and social media, we're*

gonna get stalked even harder… I should just turn off my phone now and save myself from the trouble of getting bombarded with messages and phone calls all over again…

"What should we do about them, then?" asked Todoroki yet again, quickly glancing over his shoulder. Some of the reporters and paparazzi were parting from the big group walking just a couple of meters behind them. They were probably on their way to fetch their own vehicles, hoping to then meet with the rest of their team just as he and Bakugou reached their car.

"Hah, isn't it obvious?" snorted Bakugou, the corner of his lips curving upwards to shape a knowing smirk. He promptly inserted his hand into Todoroki's pocket and pulled the car keys from there. "We're gonna lose every single one of them, hehehehe."

Why am I getting a bad feeling about this? Todoroki sighed to his own buttons, instinctively getting on his guard. He knew Bakugou had a driver's license, much like most pro heroes had, but he had never actually seen him driving before… Todoroki was now feeling conflicted between trusting Bakugou's genius ability to do anything perfectly and his rough way of handling nearly everything… "Um, maybe I should continue driving…"

"Hell no! You drove us everywhere yesterday. It's my turn now!" hissed Bakugou, protectively holding onto the key when Todoroki started motioning his hand towards it. "We're doing things fair and equitable, aren't we? Suck it up, then!"

Hearing that, Todoroki had no choice but to shut up and let Bakugou have his way. He was also still trying to get his mood somewhat better before he went for it and patched things up between them. Driving the car around for a bit to get rid of the reporters following them would maybe help him cool off a bit, who knew?

The rest of the way to the parking lot was done in silence, with just the hushed murmuring coming from their ‘stalkers’ reaching their ears amidst the regular busy city BGM. Since they were leaving pretty late in the morning, the rush hour had long ended, and the traffic on the roads was a whole lot clearer compared to a few hours prior. It was the perfect environment to drive back and forth trying to get that stubborn group to lose sight of them, even though it would definitely take a while to do so.

This will probably delay his schedule a bit more, but since he’ll be fully in control of it, I doubt he’ll complain much about it, concluded Todoroki as he opened the door to the front passenger seat and comfortably installed himself in there. Bakugou had first opened the backseat door to place his cleaning supplies there, so Todoroki used that chance and passed him his bucket too. As he waited for Bakugou to get inside and start the car, Todoroki went to check the time. “Should we grab something to eat once we’ve lost them? We can take it home with us and then eat at the new apartment before we start cleaning.”

“Oh, believe me, it’s not gonna take that long,” snorted Bakugou, making some slight adjustments to the seat and mirror. “I haven’t just been getting chauffeured around while doing nothing. I’ve memorised the license plate numbers of every single car that has been following us, and I got pretty familiarised with this car by watching you drive it. They’ll be gone in the blink of an eye.”

“Maybe I really should be the one dri-” Before Todoroki could finish that sentence, Bakugou started the car and promptly moved it out of the small parking lot. The group of journalists and paparazzi who were still around had to make way to let them pass by, some of whom were readily picked up by cars and vans that had driven there in a rush. With them already on the move, there was nothing Todoroki could do to stop Bakugou.

Correction: There was literally nothing that could stop Bakugou, not even traffic laws.

As soon as they got close to the main street, Bakugou pressed on the gas pedal without thinking twice. The car entered the main road without stopping to check for moving cars, which caused it to be inches away from colliding with the rear of the vehicle of the poor guy who had been driving past them at that moment. The sharp turn Bakugou took to get into the correct lane of the road got Todoroki sliding slightly on his seat and getting pressed against the door, tires loudly skidding against the asphalt.

Things got a bit calmer afterwards, but not for very long. Rather than slow down when a traffic light a few meters ahead of them turned yellow, Bakugou accelerated once again, masterfully moving left and right to overcome the cars in front of him. They crossed the traffic light right on time with its change to red, forcing everyone who was behind them to a stop. He could have continued going straight ahead in the main road, but Bakugou chose to abruptly turn into a smaller road, once again not T-boning another car by sheer luck.

“I-I think you’ve lost them all already,” pointed out Todoroki, holding onto his seatbelt for dear life. His face remained as expressionless as always, but inside, he was doing a countdown for the incoming car accident they were definitely minutes away from if Bakugou kept driving like that.

“Yeah, I don’t count my chickens before they all hatch,” snickered Bakugou, his evil smirk only stretching further as he accelerated once again. The car flew through an intersection as if a homing missile, somehow not crashing into a single moving car by such a tiny margin, calling it a miracle would be an understatement. “I ain’t stopping until I’ve gotten rid of every single one of those pests! Muwahahahaha!”

Once they reached a different main road, Bakugou returned to a more leisurely driving style. That must have given Todoroki a false sense of relief, the way he had let out a small sigh almost as soon as the car slowed down. However, unfortunately for him, Bakugou was simply scouting the area and counting how many ‘professional stalkers’ had managed to keep up with him. The moment he finished that, he once again accelerated while turning onto a different street, tyres

screeching and all.

From that side street, he crossed several more until he reached an entrance to the local highway. The already abnormally fast speed he was going only got worse then, putting the pro hero-grade vehicle's engine to the test. The machine obviously kept up with Bakugou's maniacal instructions, easily overtaking every single car around them. The high-speed joyride didn't last for that long, though, as Bakugou reached the next highway exit in record time. He moved to that exit lane while reducing the speed to something that wouldn't get him crashing into the car in front of them.

However, as soon as Bakugou had the chance and the leeway to do so, he once again put that engine purring like a lion and zoomed down a new main street, moving from one lane to the other to avoid the nearby vehicles moving at a much slower speed.

"Oh," interjected Todoroki, catching from the corner of his eye the unmistakable rotating red lights of a police car. They had just flown past a pair of police officers who had been leisurely turning into the main road they were travelling through at the speed of light. It went without saying that the police car turned in the same direction they were going, sirens blaring. Neither Bakugou nor Todoroki blinked an eye at it and simply proceeded with their law-breaking voyage. Instead of them, the sole car that was still chasing after them at high speed was forced into a begrudging stop.

One of the benefits of being a licensed pro hero was that they had a different set of rules and laws to abide by compared to civilians. So long as they were driving a car registered with a hero agency and didn't take any actions that could directly jeopardise the safety of everyone around them, they could break as many traffic laws as needed to reach their work site in a timely manner. Obviously, they needed to go through gruelling driving lessons to earn the right to perform such risky manoeuvres in public, but once they did, no one would ever interfere with them, even if they were caught breaking the regular laws by police officers.

Bakugou was definitely toeing the line of the grey area between safe and unsafe driving manoeuvres right now, but he ultimately seemed to fall on the safe side, as he was hardly being a nuisance to other drivers and pedestrians (if we're to forget all the near heart attacks caused to those who didn't crash into them by a dangerously thin margin, that is).

It was nevertheless a horrifying experience for those who were inside the vehicle with Bakugou, much like Todoroki had just found out.

"Now we're done," announced Bakugou, giving himself a verbal pat on the back for a job well done. He had successfully lost every single vehicle he had marked as an enemy. Since there was no longer any need for it, his driving style went through a radical change from absolutely insane stuntwork to a perfect score on a driving test.

The rest of the way to the parking lot next to their new apartment complex was a very calm, smooth ride. It allowed Todoroki to regain his bearings and calm down his accelerated heartbeat by the time the car came to a stop.

"I'm never letting you drive a car again, unless it's an emergency," declared Todoroki as soon as Bakugou turned off the engine. He promptly snatched the car key from the ignition switch and stored it back inside his pocket.

"What do you mean, you're never letting me drive a car again?" huffed Bakugou, extremely offended by whatever it was Todoroki was implying right now. He opened the door and exited the car at the same time as his 'husband', so he could continue complaining about his crappy driving assessment. "I'll let you know I'm an excellent driver! Look at it. Not even a single scratch or dent in the entire car! We also lost all of those annoyances following us in less than half an hour. So what's your problem with my driving?"

“Everything,” deadpanned Todoroki as he looked Bakugou straight in the eye and gave him that simple but direct one-word answer. Yes, he couldn’t exactly call Bakugou a bad driver, as he had certainly driven them to their goal without any issues. There were quite a lot of close calls, but they could also be interpreted as impeccably well-timed stunt moves, with a precision that was above god-tier. Bakugou’s reaction time had always been extremely good thanks to how he used his Quirk to move around midair at insane speeds, but only a through-and-through genius would be able to apply that to something as complex as driving. But, at the same time, Todoroki felt that, had they been cats, they would have just lost one of their seven lives…

It was a driving experience Todoroki never wanted to go through again unless there was a very dire emergency. In his book, Bakugou was henceforth relegated to just a backup driver akin to a last-resort weapon, not someone he’d let drive them around the town on a daily basis. Now the real question was how to convince him of that…

“We still have plenty of time until lunch time, thanks to my wonderful driving skills, so we don’t need to worry about food for the time being,” said Bakugou, opening the backseat door next to the driver’s to get the cleaning supplies he had put there. He had to pick a couple of things that had fallen off and rolled around due to the erratic driving style, but everything was in perfect condition. “We can get the cleaning started and then get something somewhere nearby once we start getting hungry.”

“Okay,” acknowledged Todoroki with a small nod of his head. He patiently waited for Bakugou to pass him the same bucket as before and then waited a bit more for him to close the door. Since he had stolen the car key from him, he had to be the one to lock the vehicle using the key fob.

The parking lot they were using was the same as before, which was a whole lot closer to their new apartment complex compared to the ones they used around their former addresses. That made the walk there

much shorter. Nevertheless, Todoroki had already gotten into the habit of always doing so whenever they were walking next to each other. He reached out to hold Bakugou's preferred hand, like they had agreed, without needing to think much about it.

However, before he could grab it, Bakugou's hand moved away to adjust some of the things he was carrying and then was smoothly stuffed inside the hoodie jacket's pocket.

No hand-holding for me this time, I guess…, Todoroki sighed to his buttons, unable to keep his disappointment just to himself with the way his shoulders dropped despondently. He had gotten to hold Bakugou's hand for a couple of seconds when he pulled them away from the crowd of journalists and paparazzi, but there had been nothing of the sort since then. *Is this because he's still mad at me? I really need to hurry up and make him less angry, or else things will only get worse between us…*

But how was Todoroki supposed to fix things?

He had thought that letting him drive would make his mood a bit better, but that didn't seem to have worked all that well, the way Bakugou had just rejected him. He also wouldn't be able to smooth things over by asking him out for a meal, since they were still a good couple of hours away from lunchtime. Cleaning was the only thing that awaited them right now, and Todoroki didn't think that was a good time to be patching things up with Bakugou.

Bakugou was right… I truly have made things a whole lot harder for us, and my father isn't even the true cause behind it…, sighed Todoroki one more time, his inner voice sounding pitifully dejected for the lack of options he had ahead of him.

After all, all Todoroki could do at the moment was just patiently wait

for the right chance.

Chapter 27

"What should we start with?" asked Todoroki, facing their still-empty living room, a bucket with cleaning supplies in hand.

"Whatever you feel like. I'm prioritising my territory first and foremost," said Bakugou with a dismissive shrug. He then turned around and made a beeline for the kitchen. "Just keep in mind what I told you before."

"Yeah, clean properly or I'll be sleeping on the balcony," deadpanned Todoroki with an affirmative nod of his head. It was impossible to forget Bakugou's threat when he kept using the same retaliation strategy for the smallest of inconveniences. And given how tense things were between them right now, Todoroki had no choice but to be very careful of said threats and warnings.

Bakugou, on the other hand, didn't so much as acknowledge Todoroki's compliance and started to prepare his surroundings for a cleaning spree. The last thing he wanted to be doing right now was thinking about that idiot, so he focused all his attention and brainpower on their current 'mission'. Though that was easier said than done…

The only reason he's alive right now is this stupid mission… Otherwise, he would currently be just a blood splatter on his kitchen floor… I'm a cleaning expert. There would be no evidence left behind to tie me to his disappearance…! …Not… Since I just married him, I'd be the number one suspect… Tsk, one more reason I should keep him alive, I guess… Not that I want to all that much right now!, grumbled Bakugou in the back of his mind as he waited for his bucket to fill with water on the kitchen sink, his index finger angrily tapping on the kitchen counter. *How dare he… HOW! DARE! HE! Easy? Me? Hah! That's gotta be the joke of the century! I'll show him how 'easy' I am, that I will! He'll never be able to utter that stupid word for the rest of his life once I'm done with him! I'm gonna make him regret having opened his stupid, moronic, dense mouth, mark my*

words! Revenge is a dish best served cold, people say… Well, I say, fuck that! That dish is gonna be as hot as hell itself!!!

Bakugou wasn't one to take disrespect and insults kindly, even if they came neatly wrapped up in 'concern'. Being called 'easy' just because he somehow ended up having sex with Todoroki was possibly the most offensive thing he had been called his whole life, even with him being well acquainted with being called very, let's say, colourful things by villains he arrested and haters who didn't like his success. In those cases, Bakugou could easily understand why they resorted to name-calling and so on. But this? He had zero clue where it had come from!

How did hooking up with someone once make him someone that is 'easy' in one's eyes? He didn't even do it with a random person, but with someone he has known for over six years. Six whole years! That alone should make him the opposite of 'easy'. Not to mention, it was Todoroki who came on to him, not the other way around. Bakugou only ended up going along with it because there was no reason not to, given the circumstances… He had also given ample opportunities to Todoroki to stop them from going too far, but that was always turned down. Or rather, Todoroki kept pushing things in that direction, despite all of those 'complaints' he had voiced out. So if anything, he was the 'easy' one, not Bakugou!

I already knew it, but there has to be something seriously wrong with his dumb brain!, Bakugou kept on grumbling to himself as he carried the bucket filled with water from the sink to the floor. He pretty much threw a cleaning rag into the bucket and then 'drowned' it and wrung it as if it were a replacement for Todoroki's neck. Once all the excess water was gone, he slapped it on the dusty kitchen counter and began cleaning it with the same angry energy of a category 5 hurricane. *He's been acting weird since the day we made this deal. Maybe I really should knock him out and send him to get checked in the hospital… Either he's having a mental breakdown or he has a huge tumour eating up the few half-assed brain cells he has…*

Bakugou was exaggerating a bit with those ramblings, but it was

undeniable that things were slightly… different. He had been ignoring it since he couldn't make sense of it, but that was getting harder and harder to do. Todoroki was obviously acting weird, and he was probably the same. No, not probably. It was 'definitely' since last night. But no matter how much he thought about it, he couldn't get a concrete read on this strange situation.

There were no reasons why he should have said 'no' to Todoroki's confusing advances, but the same could be said about saying 'yes'. Sure, he had no problems with kissing him, and getting up close and personal with him didn't annoy him nearly as much as it did with his friends. It had been so embarrassing that Bakugou thought his whole body was going to self-combust, but it was undeniable that being touched like that by Todoroki felt ridiculously good. Todoroki had accused him of being really good at seducing him, but from Bakugou's point of view, he was the one who had gotten seduced last night. He might have told Todoroki to keep going halfway through it once or twice… or thrice… or maybe more than thrice… However!!! That did not mean Bakugou was actively tempting anyone! Because he wasn't! He really wasn't!

He said I've been switching back and forth between cute and lewd or whatever he meant by that, but I don't remember ever doing any of that crap…, mumbled Bakugou in the back of his mind, purposely scrunching up his face once he felt his cheekbones warming up. Occasional weird actions and decisions aside, Bakugou had hardly done anything that might have misled Todoroki in any shape or form; that much was obvious to anyone save for his dense 'husband'. *Besides, that idiot is absolutely clueless about this sort of stuff. He gets constantly hit on by random chicks, and he has never realised what was going on. So why the heck is he blaming me for seducing him when I haven't even once tried to!? Nah, even if I did try to seduce him, there's no way in hell it would ever work on Half-and-Half Bastard! See!? Who's the actual 'easy' one now, huh!?*

"Bakugou."

"What!?" hissed Bakugou as soon as Todoroki's voice reached his ears.

He could see him standing next to him from the corner of his eye, so he just kept on aggressively wiping the kitchen counter.

"I just wanted to know which product I should use to clean the windows," explained Todoroki with the calmness of a seasoned monk, gesturing both towards his bucket and the other cleaning products Bakugou had placed by the sink. "Fuyu-nee once told me that cleaning should be done from top to bottom. So I figured I'd start with the windows before I cleaned the floor."

"You have eyes and graduated from high school! Just read the freakin' labels!" Bakugou snapped back, feeling even more peeved at Todoroki thanks to his stupid questions.

"Okay…" said Todoroki, visibly dejected after receiving such an angry reply. He let out a small sigh as he turned around and started looking through the bottles of cleaning products. *My plan has failed…*

Even if it was a stupid question, Todoroki had meant to break the ice with it, much like it had happened the previous night when he had asked him about what to do with his food. He was aiming for a long, easy-to-understand educational conversation with Bakugou and then move forward from there. However, Bakugou shut him down so quickly that he had no other choice but to raise the white flag and give up on his plan.

Maybe I should time any questions and conversations better, Todoroki told himself as he walked back to the large balcony windows with both a cleaning cloth, rubber gloves and the window cleaning product he had unearthed from all the stuff they had brought. Since he was busy cleaning his kitchen, perhaps Bakugou didn't want to be disturbed, especially while he was in a particularly bad mood. Todoroki could understand that - nobody liked to be interrupted while they were focusing on a task, after all. But he still couldn't help but feel a bit sad about it…

Things had been going so well between them that maybe Todoroki had gotten too ahead of himself. Although their deal was made on an unofficial basis, it was still considered work. Its nature itself already made the personal and the business separation line pretty nebulous. It wasn't that far-fetched for him to make an even bigger mess out of that when he already struggled so much with measuring the appropriate distance between himself and other people and decoding normal human emotions. He had also been testing boundaries for a while now. So, with all of that taken into consideration, maybe this reaction from Bakugou was just a consequence of his actions, rather than a bad mood caused by an accidentally offensive remark…

If that's the case, then I definitely need to make things clear between us. The only problem with that is how to go about it…, concluded Todoroki in the back of his mind, his heterochromatic eyes staring fixedly at the window panel he was fastidiously wiping. The more he cleaned the window, the better Bakugou's reflection on it became. That way, Todoroki would be able to tell when he'd be done with the kitchen. As soon as that section of the apartment was up to his 'husband's' high standards, he'd have an opportunity to approach him once again without annoying him further.

So that's what he did. Todoroki waited and waited for that idealised opportunity. He eventually ran out of windows to clean and had to switch to cleaning the floor of the spacious living room area, but he still kept a close eye on Bakugou, nevertheless. Thanks to that, he quietly observed the entire cleaning process of the kitchen, which was done fast and swiftly with practised skills. The apartment wasn't that dirty in the first place, as the real estate agency had kept it in pristine condition in hopes of finally getting it rented or sold, so there wasn't much need for a more time-consuming, deeper cleaning.

Funnily enough - or at least, it was to Todoroki -, that meant he had also witnessed Bakugou's mood improving somewhat. It was no wonder, the way he had been using cleaning as a healthy way to take his anger out on something without causing any damage. Todoroki could only send out some silent thanks for the dust and germs taking

the hit in his stead.

When Todoroki saw that Bakugou was about to end the kitchen area's cleaning, he hurried his own side of the cleaning as much as he could without jeopardising the quality (or else he'd risk getting yelled at). Bakugou was midway through dumping the dirty water on the bucket and filling it up again when Todoroki walked up to him.

"How's the cleaning going?" asked Todoroki, that being the only thing he could come up with to initiate a conversation with him.

"What, are you going to complain about my cleaning skills next?" grumbled Bakugou, his face promptly scrunching up into a moody frown.

"No, that's not…" mumbled Todoroki, inwardly cursing at his inability to get it right. He let out a small sigh and started anew. "Sorry, that came out wrong. I just wanted to know if things have been going according to your plan and schedule, or if there's something that needs to be improved."

"Everything's fine," scoffed Bakugou, turning back to the sink. "I'm done with the kitchen, so I'm gonna move to my room next."

"Okay," acknowledged Todoroki with a small nod of his head. Despite the bumpy start, their conversation was going fairly well. That was good. It meant Todoroki could keep going, so long as he didn't mess up again. "Um, about what happened earlier…"

"Huh?" Bakugou nearly growled, his gaze tightening as it was switched back to Todoroki and his expressionless mug. He seemed ready to jump on his throat at the smallest of slights.

“I think I misspoke when I called you ‘easy’,” explained Todoroki, his speech slow as he tried to come up with the right words to justify and vindicate himself. “I didn’t mean it like that. I just figured that since you’re so wea- Um, sensitive? …to pleasure, you should be a bit more careful so no one with nefarious intentions takes advantage of it.”

“You mean like what you’ve been doing?” grumbled Bakugou, his frown deepening even further due to Todoroki’s poor attempt at covering up the word ‘weak’.

“It’s not the same,” said Todoroki, despite the guilt that was now gnawing at him. “I don’t have any nefarious intentions towards you. And we do have a deal we’ve both agreed on. I don’t think I’ve ever done anything you were against…”

“Oh, so you do get it,” scoffed Bakugou while dismissively rolling his eyes at that half-assed justification. It was better than nothing, for the standards Bakugou had one-sidedly placed on Todoroki, but it still pissed him off. “Whatever. Just keep on cleaning and don’t get in my way. Also, don’t forget I’ll be inspecting every single corner of the apartment, so don’t you dare do a crappy job with your half of the cleaning.”

“Okay,” acknowledged Todoroki, inwardly sighing in relief. It seemed his apology had gone well, after all. It would probably still take a while for Bakugou to fully cool off, but he had made good progress towards that goal. That reassurance, in turn, created a sense of confidence that everything could now go back to how it previously was. So, much like he had done since the day they got married, Todoroki used this little pause in their cleaning duties to lean closer and kiss Bakugou.

Before he could get anywhere close to touching his lips, Todoroki was swiftly hit with Bakugou’s closed fist on the precise spot that was now

bruised thanks to the previous 3-hit combo. It was a weaker strike compared to that earlier one, but it was still strong enough to knock the air out of his lungs.

"I… Cough… I thought kisses were okay…?" gasped the incredulous Todoroki, a bit out of breath due to the pain radiating all over his ribcage and sternum. The hit had come so fast and so suddenly that he couldn't do anything about it to defend himself or minimise the strength of the punch.

"Yeah, but you don't like them 'easy', right?" grumbled Bakugou, throwing Todoroki one last glare before he grabbed the bucket from the sink, picked up the wet cleaning rag and other things he had been using around the kitchen, and stomped towards his bedroom while carrying all of it. He obviously slammed the door shut behind himself, leaving his wheezing 'husband' all alone in the kitchen.

For as dense as Todoroki might be, even he could tell this meant his apology hadn't worked after all… He tried his best to explain himself, but his words were still lacking. And if they were not lacking, then the message within them hadn't been accurately delivered to Bakugou.

This is bad. I don't know what else I'm supposed to do… Especially with how quick Bakugou is at either changing the topic or striking back…, sighed Todoroki in the back of his mind, looking twice as crestfallen as before as he rubbed his sore chest. He was in quite the sticky situation and, worse yet, he couldn't even consult with anyone to get a new perspective on it and on what he could do to fix it. He was the cause of this huge problem, and he needed to somehow become the solution to it, too.

Todoroki thought and thought and thought some more, but the right answer still eluded him.

“I won’t get anywhere like this…” sighed Todoroki, giving up on the thinking for the time being. Since nothing seemed to be working, maybe he needed to pause, take a few steps back and then go back into it with an entirely new outlook.

Todoroki checked the time on his smartphone and concluded that now was the perfect time for an intermission. He made sure he had the new keys with him and put his shoes back on at the entrance. Bakugou wouldn’t be leaving his room anytime soon, and he’d just yell at him if he disturbed him right now, so Todoroki left the apartment without telling him anything beforehand.

The neighbourhood they had just moved into was in an area of their town that Todoroki wasn’t all that familiar with, as it was outside of his hero agency’s patrolling routes and no big accident or event had ever made him work around there. It wasn’t all that much different from his soon-to-be former address, though. After a bit of walking around the main street, he quickly found what he had been looking for.

“Hi, how spicy is your mapo tofu?” was the first thing out of Todoroki’s mouth once he stepped inside the restaurant.

Nothing showed that he was repenting for his past actions and words better than a food offering, right? At the very least, that seemed something that was far too well-intentioned for Bakugou to pick it apart with his harsh remarks. Todoroki was even going out of his way to get something that he knew Bakugou enjoyed eating, just to gain some extra brownie points.

After paying the bill, Todoroki waited for a while for the cooks to finish his order - he got some cold soba and a side of tempura for himself, plus ice-cold drinks for both of them - and once done, he walked out of the restaurant with what he considered to be a little banquet for two.

He had no idea if this would thwart Bakugou's current coldness towards him, but at least Todoroki wouldn't have to think about a solution on an empty stomach. Plus, there was always the possibility that a bunch of little actions would make Bakugou forgive him bit by bit. A food offering made from mapo tofu would not give him a definite resolution per se, but it was the least Todoroki could do at the moment.

By the time Todoroki returned to the apartment, Bakugou was still locked up in his bedroom. He didn't receive any calls or messages, so he probably hadn't even noticed his temporary absence. That was a bit of a bitter pill to swallow, but again, he was simply experiencing the consequences of his own actions.

"Okay, it's time I go get him," declared Todoroki with a decisive nod of his head. They still didn't have any furniture in their new apartment and, as such, would have to make do with just the kitchen counter. Todoroki placed both his lunch and Bakugou's food offering, along with their drinks and disposable chopsticks, on the counter, making sure he didn't dirty anything that had quite literally just been cleaned. Satisfied with his 'counter setting', Todoroki walked up to Bakugou's bedroom and knocked on the door. "Bakugou."

"……What now?" It took a couple of tense seconds, but Todoroki eventually heard Bakugou's sulking voice coming from the other side of the closed door.

"I got us some lunch, so feel free to come out if you want to eat it now," said Todoroki, slightly relieved he had actually gotten a reply. He had been a bit scared that Bakugou would ignore him and give him the silent treatment, but that fortunately turned out not to be the case. He wasn't sure whether he would take him up on his offer right now or not, though…

Since Bakugou was so dangerous when 'cornered', Todoroki gave him a way to refuse eating lunch with him right from the get-go. If he agreed to eat with him right now, that was great. If he decided to eat at a later time due to having eaten breakfast well after Todoroki, that was fine too. He didn't want to put any pressure on him, so after having announced the existence of his food offering, Todoroki retreated to the kitchen without adding anything else to the short exchange.

And now I wait…, Todoroki declared to his own buttons, body as straight as an arrow as he patiently stood next to his cold soba and tempura. He was going to wait a couple of minutes to see if Bakugou would come out of his room or not. If he didn't, he'd just eat his lunch and then continue with his half of the cleaning. But if Bakugou did come out… *That'd be a really good sign. I hope that's what ends up happening. But with how stubborn and petty he is, I'm not very confident he'll choose to eat with me…*

Bakugou *was* pissed at him, after all. He was worse than a demon when in that kind of bad, vengeful mood. If Kirishima, or even Kaminari or Sero, had been the ones to anger him like this, he probably would sulk for a while, but would ultimately forgive them fairly fast, maybe after a couple of hours and a nice, long scolding. But with Todoroki? Yeah, he had nearly zero confidence that things would be that easily solved and forgiven if he was still this angry with him.

The longer Todoroki waited, the more his already very lacking confidence dwindled. The growing suspicion that Bakugou was not going to come out was ballooning to a definite certainty.

"I guess this didn't work either…" Todoroki sighed under his breath, accepting Bakugou's choice without further complaint. It seemed he really would be using this meal as fuel to come up with the next way to beg his 'husband' for his forgiveness. He had already tried four different methods, both to cool down his anger and to apologise to him, and neither of them had worked all that well. But he was sure that this bowl of cold soba, his favourite food, would provide him with some good luck and creativity.

Todoroki was about to break his disposable chopsticks apart when he heard the soft clicking sound of a door opening. He lifted his head so fast that he nearly gave himself whiplash.

"...The food isn't to blame just because you were the one who paid for it…" grumbled Bakugou as a justification for why he had come out of his bedroom after being offered some unknown lunch. His face still looked extremely grumpy, but there was no longer that same glaring anger in his gaze.

Oh. He actually came out…, gasped Todoroki in the back of his mind, still trying to process what he had just witnessed. He had no idea that food actually had the power to summon Bakugou when in a pissy mood. Todoroki gave it a try, yes, but he truly wasn't expecting it to work this well…

"What did you get me…?" asked Bakugou, more to himself than to Todoroki, as he was already opening the lid of the take-out container. It was a pretty delicious-looking serving of mapo tofu, that he had to admit… "It better be spicy enough for my taste buds."

"I asked and they said they make it pretty strong," said Todoroki, his own words cementing the fact that the lunch invitation plan had worked even better than intended. He had yet to take a single bite at it, but maybe the cold soba really had brought him some good luck.

Bakugou simply hummed in acknowledgement and grabbed his chopsticks. Just as he was about to take them out of the paper wrapper, his body was suddenly grabbed so tightly that a choked-up yelp was squeezed out of his vocal cords.

"W-What the…!?" Bakugou managed to squeak out as he fell victim to

that abrupt crushing hug. He couldn't even wiggle himself into freedom - that was how strongly Todoroki was holding his muscle-clad body.

"I know I'm repeating myself here, but I really didn't mean to hurt or offend you with what I said earlier," tiredly sighed Todoroki, holding Bakugou just a little bit tighter. He was probably squeezing him too strongly, but he wanted to have at least one chance to say everything he wanted without getting interrupted or without Bakugou escaping somewhere else. "When I said you're easy, I didn't mean it as the bad sort of 'easy'. It's, um… Just look at it from my perspective, okay? It's super easy to kiss you, right? We've done it so many times these past few days that I've already lost count of it. It's that kind of 'easy'."

"So it was the bad sort of 'easy'...!" hissed Bakugou, his surprised expression promptly morphing into his trademark raging demon look. Hadn't Todoroki locked his arms in place with his surprise hug, he would have clocked him in the face for actually doubling down on that stupid crap.

"Like I said, it's not," deadpanned Todoroki, so very confused about how Bakugou had reached that conclusion yet again. He really wasn't doing a good job at explaining himself, was he? However, since he had no clue what exactly Bakugou was misunderstanding, he also had no idea how to clear said misunderstanding. Having no other choice, he followed the same game plan from earlier and took a few steps back to the basics. "Err, when I say it's easy to kiss you, I mean it in the sense that I don't have any problems with doing it? I know we have this whole agreement, so that's a given, but… Oh. It's like when we first spoke with my father. Or when I visited your apartment for the first time. We didn't have that agreement in place yet back then, right? But it was still easy to kiss you. As in, it was fine to do it. You also said you didn't have any problems with it at that time, didn't you?"

"I mean, yeah, I did but…" grumbled Bakugou, cooling down his jets for now to first see how badly Todoroki would mess it up this time around.

“Since there were no problems even back then, wouldn’t it be possible to classify it as something that is ‘easy’?” pointed out Todoroki, feeling quite relieved that Bakugou seemed to be calming down and cooperating with this conversation.

“I guess…” Even though he really, really didn’t want to, Bakugou had no other option but to confirm what Todoroki had just said, since it was indeed true and his former words proved as much. Lying and denying it after the fact would, at most, just make him a liar and a hypocrite. However! That had absolutely nothing to do with what Todoroki had told him earlier that morning! “But just because it’s ‘easy’ with you, doesn’t mean it will also be ‘easy’ with everyone else.”

“That I have no idea,” Todoroki admitted swiftly, without a shred of hesitation. Obviously, that resulted in a particularly pissed off ‘Huh!?’ from Bakugou. By the looks of it, he needed to continue with that explanation time, or one more argument would be hitting him like a ton of bricks. “It’s not like we have a particularly close friendship, right? Like, when compared with your relationship with Kirishima, Kaminari and Sero, ours is pretty basic. To sum it up, you treat me like you treat everyone else. So since it’s easy to kiss me, wouldn’t it also be easy for you to kiss other people?”

“.....Do you even realise how stupid that sounds?” said Bakugou, beyond flabbergasted at what he had just heard. He knew Todoroki was dense, but this…? This was just plain stupidity, no other way to put it. It was all so dumb, he couldn’t even get mad at it. He was wholeheartedly amazed that someone this inept at being a human had somehow managed to graduate high school, let alone become a top 3 pro hero. Someone needed to research his brain because a miracle was definitely enclosed within his cranium…

“It makes total sense to me, though,” deadpanned Todoroki, relaxing his hold on Bakugou a bit now that he deemed that the danger levels had returned to normal. Sure enough, when he looked at his face, he saw what he could only describe as a mixture of fed up, pity and

shock.

“Hey, just because you can kiss other people at will does not mean everyone is the same, let alone me!” groaned Bakugou while rolling his eyes. Common sense sure seemed to be getting less and less common as the years went by. It was just ridiculous that he had to explain something like this to an adult. “Why would I even put myself in a situation where kissing is involved? I’m a pro hero, not a freaking host or whatever! Also, just because I’m constantly getting headhunted by villains and weirdos, like you called them, doesn’t mean they want to fuck me! They want me for my Quirk and brains, not for my freakin’ body! Last but definitely not least, I’M THE STRONGEST IN THE WHOLE DAMN WORLD! I’d end anyone who tried to jump me. You just got a little taste of that yourself. If I didn’t want you to, none of your stupid surprise kisses and so on would have happened at all. Geez, you need to hurry up and go read a dictionary because you’re confusing ‘consenting’ with ‘complaisant’!”

“Oh, I see,” said Todoroki, his heterochromatic eyes opening just a little bit wider. It turned out he was the one misunderstanding certain things, not the other way around. Or better yet, his misunderstanding of those certain things made it so that Bakugou also misunderstood everything he had been saying. There was a disconnection between what they were saying to one another, which led to that initial argument. For the sake of even better clarity, Todoroki asked with a tilted head, “So does that mean you want to kiss, touch and have sex with me but not with anyone else?”

“...Huh?” Bakugou was definitely not expecting that question and it showed, the way his entire body froze on the spot. It was as if a few rusty inner gears of his brain had been forced into moving for the first time in a long, long time. The more they spun around, the more confused and panicky Bakugou got. “N-No, that’s not… It’s… This isn’t… I-I don’t…”

Had he been a machine, this was the moment when he would start expelling smoke from all orifices in his head, followed by a massive fiery explosion as the gears and everything held in place by them

came undone. But since Bakugou was but a human being, the only thing that happened was a blood rush that got his whole face as red as a tomato.

"You're looking all cute again," pointed out Todoroki, keeping a soft chuckle only to himself. He wanted nothing more than to kiss Bakugou right now, but this probably wasn't the right moment for such a bold move.

"T-The hell I am…!" yelped Bakugou, hitting his limit thanks to that innocent comment. By instinct more than anything else, he rammed his forehead against Todoroki's face, hitting him square in the nose. The attack was so effective that he could finally break free from that tight embrace. He nearly broke the sound barrier when he scurried back inside his room and slammed the door shut.

"Ugh… Crap, I failed again…" groaned Todoroki as he carefully rubbed his sore, red nose. He had been so, so very close to a breakthrough, but then the conversation went downhill once again, perhaps thanks to that last comment. Todoroki was simply being honest and voicing what was going through his mind at the time. However, that turned out to be a big mistake, given Bakugou's reaction to it. When would he learn to keep his mouth shut at critical moments, Todoroki had to wonder. He let out a heavy-hearted sigh. "I guess I'm back to the drawing board…"

As soon as he finished that sentence, he heard the booming sound of a door being slammed open once again. From the empty bedroom came Bakugou, furiously stomping towards Todoroki and the kitchen area.

"Hmph!" scoffed Bakugou as he snatched his mapo tofu, beverage and chopsticks from the kitchen counter. He then rushed back inside his room and slammed the door shut yet again.

By the looks of it, Todoroki would really be eating his lunch alone after all…

Chapter 28

I think this should do for my bedroom and bathroom, concluded Todoroki in the back of his mind, scanning his empty bedroom with his gaze to make sure he hadn't missed anything. Cleaning rooms without furniture turned out to be much easier than those that were fully furnished. It was no wonder Bakugou wanted to do the cleaning preemptively to their move.

After his solo lunch, Todoroki wrapped up cleaning the living room area and then moved to his bedroom and the attached bathroom. He left the door open and kept a close eye on the outside as he did his thing inside the room, hoping to keep track of everything that was happening. Bakugou obviously finished cleaning his own bedroom and bathroom before Todoroki was done with his, but Todoroki missed his chance to talk to him. He had closed himself inside their extra room nearly instantly, presumably to start working on other areas of the apartment that weren't solely his. Together, they were cleaning at such a nice pace that even their hours-long delay was no longer wrecking the schedule Bakugou was so fussy about.

On the other hand, absolutely no progress was being made in regards to their first spat as a 'married couple'.

I was so close to making up with Bakugou, but then I ruined things once again, and he went back into hiding… Todoroki sighed despondently as he emptied the bucket in the bathroom sink and rinsed it. It had always been hard to communicate with Bakugou, but years of trial and error had taught Todoroki how to do it without starting an argument… or so he thought. Perhaps his success with it up until now was owed to sheer luck and Bakugou's tolerance. Now that he had gotten too ahead of himself and pushed things too far, that castle of cards was crumbling apart piece by piece.

He really wanted to straighten things up with Bakugou through open communication. But how was he supposed to do that when he was

such a poor conversationalist, and Bakugou tended to avoid heart-to-heart conversations?

Everything I've tried so far has failed one way or another. Does that mean I'm going about it the wrong way and should do something else? Todoroki had always wondered what the defining factor for getting along well with Bakugou was. Kirishima, Kaminari and Sero all got along extremely well with Bakugou, despite their differences in personality and communication styles. Copying them would probably make Todoroki seem disingenuous, but that didn't mean he couldn't use them as a starting point. *What would Kirishima do if he were in my shoes?*

Knowing Kirishima, he'd probably just tell himself to man up, acknowledge his mistakes, and wholeheartedly apologise, expressing his willingness to improve and do better in the future. But wasn't that what Todoroki had done the two times he had apologised to Bakugou? And yet, things didn't work out in his favour at all. In fact, both times ended with Bakugou storming out.

Todoroki's apologies were clearly missing something that was preventing him from succeeding. Now he just had to figure out what that missing something was…

Giving Bakugou space wasn't doing anything. Allowing him to have a multitude of outlets for his anger and stress wasn't making things better. Providing him with the final say over whether an interaction between them would occur or not ended in failure. Rather, the only times they could communicate with one another in an appropriate fashion were when Todoroki did the opposite of all those things.

"Hm… Maybe that's what works for us?" wondered Todoroki, his head slightly tilted as he waited for all the water to drip out of the wet bucket. He was terrible at speaking, and Bakugou was terrible at listening - maybe what they needed was a plan that gave him enough time to find the right words as he spoke and forced Bakugou to listen

to him until the very end. “Now that I think about it, everything goes a whole lot better when I just do things instead of asking him about it first.”

Bakugou was always a hardass whenever confronted with any topic he did not want to explore. However, he was fairly tamer whenever Todoroki acted impulsively and *did* something, like when he suddenly hugged him during lunchtime. His apology was going very well when he was squeezing him motionless, but the moment he relented while speaking, their conversation went downhill, and Bakugou found a way to walk away (though ‘running away’ was perhaps a better way to describe it).

Alright, no more playing safe, I’m going for the kill this time, declared Todoroki, his heterochromatic eyes shining with determination despite his expressionless demeanour. The more he thought about that last-ditch plan, the more on board he was with it. It was undoubtedly a very risky strategy, one that could put him in an even worse position if it flopped, but the possibility of a positive outcome far outshone its negative consequences.

Hence, Todoroki began scheming. Proceeding with that plan here at their new apartment wouldn’t do, as there were far too many spots where Bakugou could hide and barricade himself in, and routes he could use to straight out run away. Plus, if things went terribly wrong, he didn’t want their new home to take the brunt of it, both figuratively and physically.

Once he was done cleaning and drying the bucket, he filled it with all the products and items he had been using throughout their cleaning spree and brought them to the kitchen. On his way there, he peeked down the corridor and saw that the door to their extra room was still closed, meaning Bakugou was still inside. After making a quick ‘headcount’, the only places neither of them had cleaned yet were the corridor leading to their bedrooms and storage room, and the entrance leading to the living room and kitchen area. Of course, neither of them had touched the balcony save for the inner side of the window panels of the doors, but that was a working project they would only

pick up once they had moved in full-time and settled down.

“For the corridor and entrance, only the floor needs any cleaning,” Todoroki mumbled to himself, already preparing himself to do precisely that. He started with the corridor, since he was already so close to it. Within 10 minutes, there wasn’t even a spec of dust or muck anywhere in sight on that wooden floor. Todoroki was about to move to his final cleaning station when he saw a door opening out of the corner of his eye. “Oh.”

“...This one is done now,” grumbled Bakugou shortly after his eyes surprisingly met with Todoroki’s.

“I’m also done with my room and bathroom, and this corridor,” said Todoroki with a small acknowledging nod. “I was on my way to clean the entrance, which I think is the only place left. Aside from the balcony, that is.”

“You do that while I check if it’s really cleaned or if you half-assed your portion of the cleaning,” scoffed Bakugou, promptly turning around and stomping towards Todoroki’s bedroom.

Under any other circumstances, such a declaration would have caused a wave of frightening anxiety to even the best of cleaners out there. However, Todoroki remained as cool as a cucumber and calmly moved to the entrance area. While yes, he did quite a few things without much care or effort, he had poured all of his energy and skills into today’s cleaning. The stability and success of this ‘mission’ depended on a good fake relationship between the two of them; of course he made sure to do his very best with the cleaning. While it might not be on the same level as Bakugou, it was still undoubtedly a job well done. Todoroki highly doubted his ‘husband’ would be disappointed or have any reason to complain. He might have a few concerns and doubts about certain things related to Bakugou, but on this, he was dead sure.

“Tsk… That idiot actually took this seriously…” grumbled Bakugou under his breath as he exited Todoroki’s bedroom and began walking around the living room. He had hoped to find something so badly done that he would have an excuse to scream, ‘You’re going to redo everything from scratch,’ but unfortunately, there was barely anything he could nitpick at. “...That sister of his did a good job teaching him…”

“How is it?” asked Todoroki, also done with the entrance area, which officially spelt the end of their clean-up side mission.

“Shut up,” Bakugou snapped back almost by reflex. The expressionless silence and stare he got from Todoroki in response got him grumbling with a very sour expression and tone. “It’s fuckin’ perfect, happy now!?”

“So long as you’re happy with it, I’m happy too,” calmly said Todoroki after giving a quick acknowledging nod at Bakugou’s sarcastic question.

“You’re so damn annoying…” groaned Bakugou, rolling his eyes out of pure exasperation. He hadn’t been looking for an actual reply to his question, but of course Todoroki and his dense brain didn’t realise that. He turned his back to him and started stomping towards the front door. “Since we’re done here, let’s go back to our apartments and finish anything over there that still needs our attention.”

“Oh, okay.” Todoroki instinctively began following Bakugou, but then stopped in his tracks, indecisive about what to do with the cleaning supplies he was still holding. “Bakugou, what should we do with your cleaning stuff?”

“Just leave them there. Why bring them back with us when we’ll be moving all of our stuff here tomorrow?” Bakugou instructed while giving a pointed look and a small jerk with his chin to the kitchen counter. He had likewise put the cleaning supplies he had been using there on the kitchen floor, out of everyone’s way, prior to his ‘inspection’.

It wasn’t the best thing ever, but even this moody squabbling made Todoroki just a bit happy. They hadn’t talked to each other since Bakugou stormed off with his mapo tofu. After getting spoiled by so many conversations and friendly bickering, Todoroki now missed and craved that companionship, especially in that tense, silent climate. These foreign experiences and feelings made him twice as resolute to follow through with his latest plan to make up with Bakugou.

This is it. If I miss my chance now, I’ll have to wait until tomorrow for my next opportunity. As they exited their new apartment complex and walked towards the nearby parking lot, Todoroki gave himself one last inner pep talk, hyping himself up in preparation for the riskiest gamble of his life. Some would think that such thoughts were too exaggerated or overblown, but that was because they had never been on the receiving end of one of Bakugou’s explosions. He had hit him a couple of times after his failed apology attempts, but in none of those situations had Bakugou been cornered and cut off from any escape routes. What Todoroki was about to do was the opposite of that, so he had to acknowledge and accept the very high probability that Bakugou would resort to one of his deadly explosions to get out of that conversation. It went without saying that he was pretty nervous, even if it didn’t show on his expressionless face.

“Gimme the key,” Bakugou requested once they arrived at the parking lot and at their borrowed vehicle. Todoroki had snatched the car key from him as soon as he had turned off the engine, so he motioned his hand towards him, urging him to give it back so he could drive them back to their soon-to-be former apartments.

Instead of giving him the car key, however, Todoroki grabbed Bakugou’s hand and pulled him closer to the car. He quickly unlocked

the vehicle with the key fob and opened the backseat door. Todoroki then promptly pushed Bakugou into the car.

"Huh? What the…?" Too confused for proper words, Bakugou stumbled into the backseat at an odd angle, which only worsened when Todoroki also stepped into the car and pushed him further in the opposite direction. "'The heck are you…?"

The sound of the door closing silenced Bakugou mid-sentence. That allowed him to hear the precise moment Todoroki locked the car once again, much to his complete stupefaction. They were in the middle of a hot, humid summer, and now they were inside a car that had been baking under direct sunlight for several hours. It made zero sense to lock themselves inside what he could only describe as a miniature magma chamber. Bakugou got even more baffled when he saw Todoroki pressing the button on the front panel to darken the windows, followed by purposely dropping the car key on the floor, far out of either of their reach.

"I have no idea what the heck you're up to right now, but are you sure you wanna do this?" asked Bakugou, a deep frown forming on his sulky face. "'Cuz I can tell you right away that I'm not locked in here with you. *You* are locked in here with *me*!"

"I just don't want to be interrupted by anyone, not even you," explained Todoroki, taking zero damage even though Bakugou was doing his best to intimidate him with his glaring crimson eyes. He adjusted his sitting position somewhat so he could more easily face and approach Bakugou. In response, Bakugou slid his body further away from him, until his back was pressed against the locked door. He'd better start talking and explaining himself, or he could see Bakugou knocking him out cold in self-defence the moment he was within his personal space range. "I want to pick up where we left off our conversation earlier."

"Ugh, this again?" groaned Bakugou while he rolled his eyes around

in annoyance. “You’ve already made yourself pretty clear. You didn’t mean it like that, it’s not that sort of ‘easy’, yada yada. The end. Now go pick up the key from the floor and give it to me!”

“It’s only the end when you stop being angry with me,” sighed Todoroki, being rather upfront with Bakugou regarding his unwillingness to drop this matter until he was satisfied with the result. “I know I messed up with my words this morning, and I haven’t been doing a good job explaining myself since then. It’s hard to say anything about this when I don’t fully get it myself. But not knowing isn’t a good excuse to offend someone, whether by accident or not. I know you haven’t been doing any of the seducing on purpose, so I just wanted to warn you of the effect you might have on other people when you get all lewd.”

“I already told you to stop calling me lewd! I’m not lewd, I haven’t been acting lewd, and no one with a functioning brain would think I’m lewd!” hissed Bakugou, kicking Todoroki each time he was forced to say the word ‘lewd’ out loud. “Like I said earlier, just because you think I’m this or that, or you can kiss random people whenever you feel like it, doesn’t mean everyone is the same as you! Especially if that ‘everyone’ is me!”

“No, I also don’t go around kissing random people, much less feel like doing it,” deadpanned Todoroki, defending himself from these very far-fetched accusations. “Oh. But I do feel like kissing you from time to time. Mainly when you start acting either cute or lewd.”

“And I keep telling you I’m neither of those two things!” exasperatedly groaned Bakugou, kicking Todoroki a couple more times for good measure. “Are you perhaps also confused about what those two words mean!? Because I’m pretty sure no one, and I mean absolutely no one, has ever said or thought those words when in association with me!”

“I can’t tell you what other people say or think, but I feel like those two words are a good match to you,” said Todoroki, scooching slightly

closer to Bakugou, despite all the retaliatory kicking going around. “Why are you so against them? I can see why ‘easy’ would bother you and I’m relieved I could clear up that misunderstanding already, but I don’t understand what your problem with ‘cute’ and ‘lewd’ is.”

“What do you mean, you don’t understand!? There’s not a single man on earth who wants to be called ‘cute’, much less by another man!” Bakugou protested, his frown growing exponentially more pouty as he kept whining about Todoroki’s terrible choice of words. “And ‘lewd’ is just as bad as ‘easy’, you absolute doofus!”

“Fine. What about ‘erotic’?” sighed Todoroki, willing to compromise and find a better term if that would make Bakugou feel better about it.

“Are you trying to get me to punch you again?” snarled Bakugou as a warning.

“Then… ‘sexy’?” suggested Todoroki next, after giving it a quick thought. That word earned him yet another glare and a low, angry growl. He interpreted that as a ‘no’. He thought about it some more as a result. “Okay, what do you think of ‘hot’?”

“I’m still not happy about any of that, but at least it’s more acceptable…” grumbled Bakugou, his scowl softening just a tiny little bit. Why was he even having this vocabulary discussion with Todoroki? The problem wasn’t what words he used, but the fact that he wanted to use them on him to begin with! However, explaining that to this brainless fool was easier said than done…

“Okay, ‘cute’ and ‘hot’ it is,” acknowledged Todoroki, feeling quite satisfied they were able to reach a consensus on this matter after so much bickering.

“Wait, no, stop with the ‘cute’ too!” yelped Bakugou, getting yanked right back into arguing about this ridiculous topic shortly after he had thought they were finally done.

“Sorry, but I don’t think I can compromise on that one,” said Todoroki with a very serious, sombre expressionless demeanour. “You are unmistakably cute at times, no matter how much you deny it. Or better yet, denying it this much only makes you seem even cuter despite you trying to look like the opposite of cute.”

“You seriously need to go to the hospital. There has to be something wrong with your eyes or your brain or both,” groaned Bakugou, his head dropping backwards until it was hitting the darkened window. Forget about arguing his way into an acceptable descriptive vocabulary; he just wanted to get out of this whole insanity…

“There’s nothing wrong with me, I’m just being honest,” explained Todoroki, his head slightly tilted. While it was somewhat heartwarming that Bakugou was worried about his health and well-being, it was strange that that was his first thought when someone complimented him. But that conversation would have to be saved for another time. “Now that we’ve cleared the matters about the ‘easy’, ‘le-’ I mean, ‘hot’ and ‘cute’, are we good?”

“…Like hell we are. I’m still pissed at you,” grumbled Bakugou, even though his face looked more ‘pouty’ than ‘pissed’ right now. “You’ve been running around like a dumb, headless chicken trying to defend yourself, but you haven’t learned a single thing from it. You should be the one putting yourself in my shoes, yeah? How would you feel if someone basically slut-shamed you for having sex with someone once and then doubled down on it by putting all the blame on you? It’s not all that nice, now is it? Besides, if anything, you’re the easy one! If, and this is a big ass if, alright!? *If* I had indeed tried to seduce you or whatever, you’re still the one who fell for it in the blink of an eye! Where did that dense moron who can’t even tell when a girl is flirting with him go to, huh? Well, newsflash, I know, but I didn’t try to seduce you even once! So that makes you twice as easy! How do you like them apples now!?”

“I… guess you have a point,” conceded Todoroki, albeit a bit hesitantly. Not because he was offended by it or scandalised that Bakugou was now trying to turn all of that on him. He was simply digesting and processing that accusation, not to pick it apart and deny it, but to understand how inexplicably right it was.

Todoroki hadn’t thought much about it up until now, but it was true he had perhaps been a bit too eager to have sex with Bakugou the moment he realised it was possible to do so. He couldn’t remember a single instance where he had been so turned on by someone that he wanted to fuck them right there and then. But with Bakugou, that had become the most sensible outcome after a bit of kissing and touching. Then again, he had never kissed and touched someone like how he had kissed and touched Bakugou. He had no baseline to use as a comparison.

What was it about Bakugou that captivated and turned him on so much?

Todoroki stared and stared at him, trying to find an answer amid Bakugou’s cute sulking face and the few glimpses of the hickeys on his neck that he could see peeking out from under his hoodie jacket. What he got was a big, fat nothing, if he were to put aside the urge to smooch those pouty lips and soft cheeks. It was quite an overwhelming urge, since he had yet to kiss him that entire day. Their physical contact had also been so limited that he could easily claim to be extremely touch-starved right now. He knew there was hardly anything that could top the act of sleeping together, but for their 5th day as a fake married couple to be this bleak and bare…

“…What am I supposed to do about that?” asked Todoroki, the words slipping out of his mouth before he realised what he was doing.

“Huh?” interjected Bakugou, a bit confused about what that question

was even about.

“If I’m so easy when it comes to you, what am I supposed to do about that?” clarified Todoroki, both for Bakugou’s sake and his own. While actions might work better than words when it came to the two of them, there was something about translating those actions into words that felt as if a little seedling. At first, it was just there, in its own little corner. But by giving it time and a bit of the nurturing it craved for, it sprouted into something new but also so much more self-evident. What would be born if they kept feeding this seedling they were so crassly calling ‘being easy’, Todoroki had to wonder.

“H-How would I know? It’s your problem, so you do something about it,” grumbled Bakugou, his voice coming out smaller than usual out of hesitation and self-consciousness. He already knew that Todoroki was straightforward to a fault, but this was going a bit too far with that personality trait…

“We’re going to be married for a good while, Bakugou. That makes all of my problems your problems too,” pointed out Todoroki, giving a big leap forward and coming close enough to be sitting right next to Bakugou’s haphazardly folded legs. The backseat of their borrowed vehicle was big enough to seat three adult men side by side comfortably, but the two of them were squeezing into barely half that space. Todoroki placed his hands on the cushy seat, on either side of Bakugou’s hips, while also bridging the remaining gap between them with his upper body. “We’ve mutually agreed that kissing and touching are fine, since it helps increase our acting skills as a fake couple. But you also said that anything beyond that was a no-go after sleeping with me once. So… what should I do if I ever get accidentally seduced by you again?”

“…Nothing, that’s what you should do…” Bakugou mumbled under his breath. Good thing Todoroki was already close enough to catch those fleeting words, though that also meant he could effortlessly capture the pouty lips that had uttered them so lightly.

Whoever first said that absence made the heart grow fonder had been absolutely right, and Todoroki had just gotten a little taste of that himself. Now that he was finally kissing Bakugou, he felt like a dying merchant lost in a desert who had at long last found an oasis brimming with refreshing water. Whether it was because he was at death's door or because he was simply that greedy, Todoroki found himself unable to part his lips from that which he craved so earnestly. It was but a chaste kiss, just lips pressing against lips, but it felt so good it could make anyone forget about time and place.

"...Didn't I just tell you that you should do nothing?" sighed Bakugou, his way of letting out the breath he had been holding as that little kiss went on and on.

"Yeah, but it's a kiss. Per our agreement, it's totally fine to do it," said Todoroki, part of him relieved that Bakugou didn't decide to strike at him this time around. After being rejected so many times, he could only interpret this little peck as Bakugou's way of extending him an olive branch. He might still be mad with Todoroki, but his apology had already been accepted.

"Stop acting like a smartypants, when you don't even know the difference between 'consenting' and 'complaisant'," grumbled Bakugou, promptly deploying his number one casual attack pattern of pinching and pulling Todoroki's cheek.

"Now I know," chuckled Todoroki, moving one of his hands from the backseat to pull away the rough fingers pinching his cheek so leniently. His touch lingered on his hand for a bit, but Todoroki ultimately decided to do the same thing to him and gently pinched Bakugou's cheek as he cupped his face. "If I can't do it, it was a 'no'. But if I can do it, I can keep going."

That's not how any of that works, or so Bakugou thought to his own buttons as he let himself be kissed all over again, though this time with a whole lot more urgency and passion. The previous

breathlessness seemed like a joke compared to how Todoroki had truly stolen his breath away with this kiss. It was deep and relentless, but also patient and tender - just like all of those kisses they had shared the previous night. Whatever complaints and hisses Bakugou had in store for Todoroki were swiftly forgotten or set aside in exchange for a single thought. *I guess I'm getting randomly pinned down against all sorts of places and pieces of furniture until the day we get divorced…*

Since that seemed to be a trend that would not stop - an inevitability, if you will -, fighting against it was pointless. It would just be a waste of his precious time, or so Bakugou was concluding. He'd rather just accept it as it was and deal with it than needlessly struggle time and time again, only to surrender and relent in the end. Not only was it harmless, but it was also easier to let Todoroki kiss him at random moments than it was to placate him and his stubborn one-track mind.

"Mmmgh…!" Bakugou could feel his body tremble, but also relax, as Todoroki masterfully got him to lower his guard, one kiss at a time. Thanks to his poor choice of words, Bakugou could only interpret this near instantaneous 'disarmament' as him surrendering to Todoroki's tenacious advances. Even though he wanted to sulk and pout and be mad at him for at least a day or two to teach him a lesson, Bakugou couldn't keep that pretence up after a few sweet nothings and a bit of kissing. It also didn't help that his body was already so uncomfortably hot. "Ngh… Todoroki, I'm dying here…"

"Yeah, I'm also dying for more," acknowledged Todoroki, chuckling a little bit at how beet red Bakugou's face was right now. The cheek he was cupping with his hand felt like a mini-heater, and even his earlobe felt hot to the touch when he traced it lightly with the pad of his finger. This sort of overreaction really made him want to touch Bakugou more and more, to find out which other parts of his body were already that steaming hot.

"No, I'm literally dying right now… It's too fuckin' hot inside the car!" yelped Bakugou, big droplets of sweat sliding down his temples and the back of his neck. It was so hot and stuffy inside that locked metal

box that even breathing was getting hard to do, whether kisses were involved or not. “You might be able to regulate your body temperature at will, but I can’t! I’m one degree away from blowing up with half of the country, nuclear bomb style!”

“Oh. Sorry,” apologised Todoroki, pulling away from Bakugou a little bit to give him some breathing room, so to speak. Now that he thought about it, he should have at least opened a window or two a little bit before he locked them in the car. There were far too many sadly real horror stories of children and pets passing away due to being left in the car for several hours during the hotter months of the year. The same would probably not happen to them, but heat stroke was still a possibility for Bakugou, not to mention how unstable nitroglycerin got at extreme temperatures. He didn’t want to stop this moment they were having, though, so he dragged Bakugou along as he sat up straight on the backseat and got him straddling his lap. From that new position, he could easily reach and pick up the car key he had purposely dropped on the floor.

“Give it here,” grumbled Bakugou as he slapped the key out of Todoroki’s hand. With a bit of stretching and contorting, he managed to lean his upper body backwards until he could reach the driving wheel and the control panel. He smoothly inserted the key into the ignition switch, gave it a quick turn and immediately turned on the AC in its coldest setting. He would have let out a sigh of relief had Todoroki not pulled him closer by tugging his hoodie jacket the moment that temperature problem was no longer in their way. He grumbled, “You’re so damn stubborn once you get going…”

“That’s what happens when you starve and ignore me the whole day,” deadpanned Todoroki, wrapping his arms around Bakugou’s slender waist to bring their bodies so close together that their chests were pretty much glued to one another.

“I didn’t think you’d be the clingy, needy type,” scoffed Bakugou, doing a poor job of hiding his flushed cheekbones with a light frown.

“Neither did I,” confessed Todoroki, owning up to that ‘clingy’ label by hugging Bakugou more tightly. He lightly kissed him at first, but it didn’t take too long for them to return to that heavier making out that left them both gasping for air. It really was hard to stop once he started, and it was mainly because Bakugou looked so irresistibly sexy when doing so. It confirmed that, despite all of the denial and hissy fits, Bakugou truly was weak to pleasure. While how good it felt didn’t impact Todoroki as much, it could also be said that he was extremely weak towards Bakugou, much like his ‘husband’ had pointed out earlier. That combination made them a match made in heaven, and Todoroki highly doubted that his father would ever find someone more compatible with him, even if he searched the entire world for a better ‘bride candidate’. “You don’t like me being clingy?”

“It’s a pain in the ass, but aside from that…” grumbled Bakugou, ultimately giving an open-ended reply to that question. Todoroki seemed to have liked it, though, the way he shamelessly snuggled up to him despite the insufferable temperature.

“By the way…” started Todoroki very cautiously, attentively studying Bakugou’s face to see if it was safe to proceed or if he should keep quiet. Since Bakugou had mellowed out quite a bit thanks to all of the snogging, he decided to go for it and pray he wouldn’t ruin everything with his next words. “You never answered my question.”

“What question…?” asked Bakugou, his BS-meter ringing and warning him about what was about to come his way. For all his faults, he had an excellent, well-tuned instinct and sixth sense, which allowed him to prepare in advance for the stupidity that came out of other people’s mouths.

“Do you want to kiss, touch and have sex with me and no one else, or are you going along with it just because?” straightforwardly asked Todoroki, doing exactly as he told himself he would and going straight for the kill. Bakugou’s face was already pretty red and flushed from all the kissing and the muggy temperature inside the locked car, but it amazingly became even redder as he crossed that nagging question off his to-do list.

“T-That’s none of your business,” mumbled Bakugou, immediately turning his face away with a moody ‘hmph’ so he wouldn’t have to look straight at Todoroki’s pointed stare. “You got my consent, so what does any of that matter?”

“I’m just curious,” said Todoroki with a quick shrug. “Getting to know each other better will come in handy for our current mission. Besides, you’re so good at keeping your private life away from the spotlight that I have no idea what you’ve been doing outside of work these past three years. Adding that to your body’s… peculiarities, of course I’m curious.”

“Hmph, my sex life is also none of your business,” Bakugou scoffed, not falling for any of Todoroki’s sweet-talking attempts. The only thing that slightly rattled him was the way that verbal block got Todoroki’s hands moving and sneaking inside his clothes in return. “Hey, don’t think you’ll get an answer out of me by touching me all over!”

“That worked just fine last night, didn’t it?” pointed out Todoroki, his head innocently tilted as he looked at him with those heterochromatic puppy dog eyes of his. In contrast, his warm hands kept on moving in a very NSFW kind of way, with one of them sliding up Bakugou’s sensitive back while the other inserted itself in the tight gap between his perky butt and his pants’ waistband.

“You’re really asking for one more explosion to the face, huh?” warned Bakugou, unconsciously leaning forward some more to get some distance from Todoroki’s perverted hands. But since they were literally inside his clothes, that didn’t work out all that well for him. In fact, it made it easier for Todoroki to pick up where their kisses had left off. For as much as he’d like to carry out his half-hearted threats, he was far too lenient with Todoroki’s half-assed ministrations to do something for real. Man, he really was ‘easy’ when it came to this moron, wasn’t he…? “How about you shut up and do something more useful with your mouth?”

“Okay,” said Todoroki right away, more than happy to comply with that command. He was very keen on making up for all the previous rejections and for all those hours he had been in a cold war with Bakugou; of course he was going to take Bakugou up on his offer. He’d kiss him for the rest of the day if he could, but that was probably too absurd a goal to have. So rather than doing just that, Todoroki decided to aim for a great time spent together with his ‘husband’, with no more arguments or fights in sight.

As they kept kissing each other back and forth, Todoroki removed his hand from Bakugou’s broad back and brought it forward. It was quite troublesome to make way between their glued torsos, but where there was a will, there was a way. And he for sure had an unyielding will to get to the zipper that kept Bakugou’s hoodie jacket closed. Once that deed was done, Todoroki nearly pounced on him as he pulled the jacket halfway down his arms and back, putting it safely out of his way.

“Ngh… Why do you always have to go after the most obvious spots…?” grumbled Bakugou, suppressing a small gasp and the ensuing trembling as Todoroki went after his neck. The journalists, paparazzi and fans alike would already have a field day once someone noticed all the conspicuous marks on his neck in all the photos that had been taken of them that morning. Todoroki was only going to make that pain in the arse worse by adding even more hickeys or bite marks there.

“It’s too much of a treat to ignore,” casually admitted Todoroki right before he slowly licked the entire length of Bakugou’s neck, only stopping once he had reached his jaw. The fidgeting and pleasurable sigh that such a simple thing caused was the perfect example of why Todoroki couldn’t say no to this delicious morsel of eroticism whenever it was right before his eyes.

“Pervert,” scoffed Bakugou while he rolled his eyes at Todoroki’s bluntness. If only all of his fangirls and fanboys could hear him speak

right now… They'd get the shock of their lives if they found out that their precious, innocent, prince charming Shouto was just your average pervy young man in the end.

"Why complain when you like it just as much?" said Todoroki in his own defence. To make his argument even more evident, he licked and suckled on the side of his neck, a move that got Bakugou's body jolting from head to toes and forced him to cover his mouth with his hand. He could have slowed down now that he had made his point come across, but why waste such a great opportunity? As Todoroki delighted himself with tasting that delicious neck, his hand kept on groping and kneading Bakugou's soft ass.

"…Don't get too ahead of yourself just because I'm letting you take advantage of this situation," protested Bakugou, promptly kissing Todoroki right afterwards so he wouldn't have the opportunity to talk back at him. To make doubly sure he wouldn't target any spot aside from his lips for a while, Bakugou wrapped his arms around his shoulders and grabbed onto his t-shirt. He inwardly celebrated how brilliantly he had disabled Todoroki's dangerous mouth with a single move, unaware that in Todoroki's mind, that was pretty much equivalent to declaring, 'Go ahead and pounce me harder.'
"Mmmngh…!?"

Not only did the smooching get a whole lot more intense out of the blue, with Todoroki occasionally nibbling and suckling on Bakugou's lips and tongue, but his audacious hands also received an entirely new task. He brought Bakugou's waist even closer to him while the hand halfway down his pants switched from groping his round buttcheek to rubbing and lightly prodding the tight little hole sandwiched between that alluring softness. Each time Bakugou's body jolted in response, their lower halves would pleasurably grind against each other, inflaming both of them with even more lust.

"Mmngh! W-Wai- Haa… Ngh…!" gasped Bakugou, pulling his face away from Todoroki when all of that became a bit too much for him. But just because the kiss had been brought to a halt doesn't mean the same would happen to his hands. Todoroki's fingers kept on teasing

him, rubbing and pressing down on that sensitive entrance without ever venturing inside. Bakugou had to bite down on his lower lip and press his forehead against Todoroki's shoulder to prevent any embarrassing sound from leaking out. "T-Todo- Ahh…!"

A stronger push against his hips was all it took to make those preventative measures fail miserably. That sweet, but slightly shy, moan was truly like music to Todoroki's ears. Or rather, it was an inviting lullaby that seduced him ten times out of ten. The physical reactions that came along with it only made it even more irresistible.

"Bakugou," Todoroki called, his own voice a bit heavier from arousal. He carefully parted his hand from Bakugou's hips and brought it closer to him, using it to lift his flustered face from its hiding place on his shoulder. Oh, and what a sight that face was. Being turned on really accentuated how beautiful Bakugou was. "I got you hard once again. I have to take responsibility for that this time too."

"Ngh…" That ambiguous groan was all Bakugou could muster at first, his face scrunched up into an embarrassed pout. He had fallen for Todoroki's little scheme hook, line and sinker, hadn't he? The fact that he wasn't punching the living daylights out of him right now told him as much. Instead, his gaze dropped, unable to hide his face because of the hand holding it. His hands gripped Todoroki's t-shirt more strongly as he parted his quivering lips and mumbled, "...Not here."

Unlike his previous intimidation attempt, this 'attack' was extremely effective against Todoroki. It got him driving back home almost as rashly and definitely not as safely as Bakugou had earlier that morning.

Chapter 29

After the massive flop the car pursuit turned out to be, the journalists, reporters, and paparazzi had no other choice but to return to the only location they were sure that would allow them to catch up with the newlywed couple: pro hero Shouto's current apartment complex.

Some were already starting to baulk under the lack of yummy info and photos, and were abandoning the time-consuming vigil in exchange for interviews with pro heroes and coworkers who were familiarised with both Shouto and Dynamight. That slow leak meant that the group clogging the sidewalk right in front of the multistorey building diminished with each passing hour. All in all, only half of the initial headcount remained in place. It also meant that those who were still there were the stubborn pros who would not leave until they got the sensational scoop they were after.

As they waited for their targets to return home, they entertained themselves with a bit of online sleuthing, scouring social media and all sorts of forums and group chats in hopes of finding a clue that revealed the couple's current location or, better yet, their new address. Unfortunately for them, they weren't being all that successful with their endeavours, and neither were their coworkers, who had been tasked with those interviews while they remained stationary in that spot.

Hours and hours of waiting in the sun, during a particularly humid summer, were beginning to take their toll on them, both physically and mentally. They were so desperate for something, especially for an excuse to leave that boring main street and look for a scoop somewhere else more stimulating.

Hence, some tears were shed when those tired, overheated journalists and paparazzi realised they were not experiencing a mass hallucination or mirage, but instead were truly witnessing the return of the viral couple.

“Damn it, those pests are still here…” Bakugou cursed under his breath, his crimson eyes tightening into a begrudging glare. One of his hands was currently occupied holding Todoroki’s, but he could still use his free hand to adjust his stuffy, uncomfortable hoodie jacket.

“I can get them to leave, if you want to,” said Todoroki, chuckling to himself at Bakugou’s instantaneous moody response to the excited group already turning their cameras their way. He could sort of sympathise with him in this regard at the moment, as they weren’t in a very PG condition underneath their loose summer clothes. Since Bakugou didn’t add anything else to his offer, Todoroki deemed that to be a silent ‘go ahead’.

Once they reached the crowd and were trying to get to the apartment complex’s entrance, Todoroki let go of Bakugou’s hand and instead wrapped his arm around his waist, protectively pulling him closer and partially shielding him from any intrusive photos. That, nevertheless, unleashed a barrage of camera flashes and a cluster of questions on top of more questions.

“Do you really need to be this stubborn about keeping guard at our doorstep?” sighed Todoroki, ignoring all of the questions and instead pushing forward one of his own. “No matter how many times you ring my doorbell, we aren’t inviting any of you to my apartment.”

“We just want to ask a couple more questions, or maybe even organise a more casual interview with both of you,” said a journalist, desperation showing in her tired voice.

“We’re currently on our honeymoon. Unless there’s an emergency, we won’t be doing any work until next week,” said Todoroki, his serious tone leaving no room for discussion. “You being here night and day is bothering the other residents of this apartment complex. We’re not going to accept any interview requests or answer your questions. Just

make do with this and go home, back to your families. I'll be doing the same with mine for the rest of the day."

The journalists and paparazzi were a bit confused about what he had meant by 'just make do with this' at first, but everything became quite clear when Todoroki shamelessly kissed Bakugou right there and then, much to everyone's surprise - Bakugou included. The onslaught of photos being taken nearly drowned the excited squeals of journalists and passersby alike. Whether it was fortunate or unfortunate was debatable and up to each individual's preferences, but this time around, there were no falls involved with this public display of affection. Though that was mainly because Todoroki was holding Bakugou so closely against his own body. Had he not, there was a slight chance that a few knees might have buckled under that passionate kiss.

"Goodbye, then," said Todoroki to finish up that brief conversation, pretty much whisking Bakugou into the apartment complex's lobby area while the journalists and paparazzi were too busy celebrating their newly acquired prized photos to get in their way. Now that it was just him and Bakugou, he could relax once again and not be in overprotective mode. "That should keep them entertained for a good while."

"...If they were that easily pleased, they would have left by now," grumbled Bakugou, not all that happy to have yet another incoming set of compromising photos of himself stuck on the World Wide Web for the remainder of time. At this rate, there would be more photos of him acting all lovey-dovey with Todoroki than of him doing his job as a pro hero…

"So long as they don't ring my doorbell repeatedly for the next few hours, I'll consider this a small victory," deadpanned Todoroki as he pressed the elevator's call button. The metallic door readily slid open in yet another display of his good-luck surge. He grabbed Bakugou by the waist once again and pulled him into the elevator, his mouth already greedily devouring his lips.

Bakugou had no complaints about this kiss, though, and even held onto Todoroki's upper arms to keep him as close as possible. Since they had been forced to stop halfway through their make-out session and then drive and walk all the way back to their former apartments, they were both twice as keen on engaging in any kind of intimate physical contact. They were so lost in their lust for one another that they didn't notice they hadn't pressed any floor button until the elevator door closed and the lights inside went dark.

Todoroki couldn't help but snort a little bit at that little mishap as he hurriedly pressed the button to his floor, all while he continued indulging in sweet, passionate kisses with his 'husband'. The elevator's slow ascent felt like a teasing roadblock to their pressing wants, but being able to kiss and touch Bakugou all the while was a good buffer until they got to the bedroom. When he took a step forward, pushing Bakugou's back against the wall, and slotted his knee between his legs, Todoroki could feel how hard he already was underneath his clothes. That, in turn, got him just as aroused.

"Mmngh…" Their endless kisses turned a small moan into a muffled groan, but did little to suppress the way Bakugou's body trembled at that additional pressure against his groin. His nails reflexively sank into Todoroki's upper arms - that about summed up how he felt about those bold advances and how unreceptive of them he was not.

Todoroki must have noticed and correctly interpreted all of that, as he soon let his hands slide from Bakugou's hips all the way down to his butt. He was a straightforward man at heart, so he didn't shy away from physically demonstrating what he was dying to do the moment they arrived at his apartment. It was sort of disappointing that there were still so many layers of fabric between them, though. They might not hide what a banger of a body Bakugou had, but it was simply leagues away from what it felt like to touch him directly.

Due to being too distracted by Bakugou's perky butt, neither of them was paying all that much attention to the elevator itself. Once again,

they completely missed the moment it came to a stop and the pronounced sound of the door sliding open. What gave away their accidental predicament was a flustered yelp. A yelp that had originated from neither Bakugou nor Todoroki.

They hurriedly tore their lips apart and looked at the wide-open door at the same time. In the corridor, they could see a young lady, presumably one of their downstairs neighbours. Her face was beet red from the scandalous scene she had accidentally walked into, but neither reproach nor disgust showed on her body language. She simply offered them a quick bow as an apology for the interruption and moved to the side until she was facing the closed door of the other elevator. Seconds later, the elevator door closed, and they resumed their ascension.

“I think now we’re the ones who are being a bother to our neighbours…” mumbled Todoroki, still a bit taken aback by that little accident.

“Argh, I hate this mission so damn much…!” groaned Bakugou, dropping his head backwards and letting it hit the cold metal wall a couple of times. He really had to admonish himself for their willful lack of discretion and for the little care they were giving to their surroundings, especially given that he was currently the main target of a villain group. This apartment complex was just a regular one, with minimal security measures implemented. Had it been someone with nefarious intentions who had walked in on them just now, they could have been severely injured or worse.

“We’re almost there. Just hold on a little while longer,” chuckled Todoroki, taking a quick glance at the digital display announcing the floor they were on. They were just passing by Bakugou’s floor, so they were seconds away from those doors opening again, this time on the floor they actually wanted to go to.

“You were the one who jumped me, you moron…” grumbled

Bakugou, sulky dissatisfaction showing on his frowning face. It got a little better when Todoroki gave him a little peck on the forehead, but the displeased look on his face only fully vanished when the elevator stopped and they walked outside into the corridor. He thought he'd be free to move around as he pleased, but Todoroki didn't think twice about grabbing and holding his hand once again, even though his apartment was just a couple of steps away. "Heh, are you scared I'm gonna run away or something?"

"Given your track record, kinda," deadpanned Todoroki, failing to see what part of that very high probability amused Bakugou so much. With his other hand, he grabbed his keys from his pocket and unlocked his front door. He could have easily yanked and dragged Bakugou inside, but watching him walk in on his own was far too good a sign for him to ruin it. Once they were both in his apartment, Todoroki closed the door and immediately switched all of his attention to his 'husband', circling his waist with both of his arms like he was caging him in his embrace and throwing the key away. "But since you came inside of your own free will, I guess I don't have to worry about that right now."

"You saying that makes me want to ruin your expectations," snorted Bakugou, a mischievous smirk slowly tugging at the corner of his lips as he grabbed Todoroki's face by his cheeks with just one hand and gave his head a little shake. "If you don't want that to happen, keep your dumb comments to a minimum. I don't run away, I do tactical retreats. Got it?"

No, I'm pretty sure that was 100% 'running away', Todoroki pointed out in the back of his mind, choosing to keep such a thought to himself only rather than feed into Bakugou's contrarian personality. Besides, the less they talked, the longer he could keep kissing Bakugou, so this suited him just as well.

And kissing he did, even as they took their shoes off while sticking so awkwardly close to one another. It sounded so silly, but Todoroki felt like he couldn't afford to waste even a single second not touching Bakugou in some way. He had done his best to hold back for so long;

now, he wanted to have nothing more than all of Bakugou. And unless he was misreading or misunderstanding something, he could indeed have him once again.

Once the shoes were out of the way and messily set aside at the entrance, they moved deeper into the apartment. Now that they were truly alone and no longer in a public place, Todoroki didn't need to keep his hands to himself any longer. He only let go of Bakugou's waist so he could once again unzip his hoodie jacket, this time taking it off completely and dropping it to the floor. It was a bit of a bumpy trip, with them hitting some of the stacked boxes along the way due to being far too preoccupied kissing one another, but Todoroki's old apartment wasn't as big as their new one. He was still in the process of removing Bakugou's t-shirt by the time they barged into his bedroom.

As far as Bakugou was concerned, that was some good progress, considering he had already been fully naked before he touched the bed the previous night. This time, he had been tugging and pulling up Todoroki's t-shirt to undress him too as he was made to sit down on the bed.

"Ngh, enough with my neck already…" mumbled Bakugou, his body leaning more and more backwards as he was pushed down onto the bed, all while Todoroki licked and sucked on his neck. At the rate his neck was targeted, it would become just one giant bruised area rather than a collection of hickeys and tiny nip marks.

"I can't help it. I really like kissing and licking your neck," chuckled Todoroki, taking immense pleasure in the way Bakugou fidgeted around at his foreplay. His hands travelled downwards to take his pants and underwear off, while his mouth kept working around his upper body. "Though not as much as I like touching you here."

"Ahh!" Bakugou's body jolted suddenly when Todoroki captured one of his nipples between his lips, licking and sucking at the rosy tip to

get it all moist and hardened before he could bite into it with his front teeth. He got a wonderful response out of it, as usual, much to Bakugou's embarrassment. His entire chest area still felt extremely sensitive after receiving so much attention not even 24 hours ago. If the simple rustling of fabric against his nipples made him self-conscious of that, having them teased like this all over again made him feel *everything* twice as hard. Partially out of flustered panic, Bakugou slapped his hand on Todoroki's face and pushed his head away as hard as he could. "H-Hold on!"

"What's wrong?" asked Todoroki, a little bit confused about this sudden reversal in cooperation. He thought Bakugou was fully on board with everything that was happening right now, so he couldn't understand what had made him flip out without any warning.

"M-My chest is out of commission right now. Go touch somewhere else," demanded Bakugou, unable to explain what was going on more elaborately than that. What was he even supposed to say about something like this? That Todoroki had groped, pulled, licked and bitten his nipples and pecs so much last night that they were now weirdly… weird?

"Why? Are you hurting there?" asked Todoroki next, head slightly tilted despite the hand still pushing it away. He was the one with a huge bruise on his chest, and none of that lingering pain was stopping him from getting it on. "I don't think I've done anything that could cause you pain in that area of your body, though…"

"What do you mean you haven't done anything that could have caused this!?" hissed Bakugou almost instantly, Todoroki's words having inadvertently rubbed him the wrong way (no pun intended). He let go of his face but only so that he could adjust his grip and grab him by the cheeks, forcing Todoroki to take a good, hard look at his chest. "Look at your fuckin' handiwork! Do you see this right here? THAT'S YOUR BITE MARK! It's a miracle you didn't rip a chunk of my skin! And all of this in this area here? Yup, that's what happens when you suck so hard you burst my freaking capillaries! That makes it the same as a bruise, in case you didn't pay attention during biology

lessons! So yeah, my chest is out of commission right now, and it's all your fault!"

"Oh. I see," said Todoroki, doing as told and paying very close attention to Bakugou's chest. Obviously, he could see all of those marks that were being so educationally introduced to him. However, they honestly looked so hot on Bakugou's pale skin and muscled, toned body that his horny brain didn't register half of what his 'husband' was saying. "Should I avoid those areas and only bite and lick you where there are no marks, then?"

"I'm gonna kill you," announced Bakugou, his voice cold as steel and as sharp as a butcher knife. He once again let go of Todoroki's face and rearranged the positioning of his limbs. He wrapped his arms around his shoulders while his legs wrapped themselves around Todoroki's waist, rendering him unable to escape his hold, even if it only restricted his mobility to a certain extent. Bakugou then opened his mouth wide and sank his teeth into the side of his neck, giving his jaw the workout of a lifetime.

"Wai- Owowowow…! B-Bakugou, you're biting too hard…!" begged Todoroki, getting just a bit alarmed when he felt his skin being pierced by Bakugou's teeth. By the looks of it, Bakugou wasn't kidding around when he said he'd kill him… for the most part. Todoroki was not about to meet his maker, but he was still in for a world of pain and petty payback, Bakugou's favourite three P's.

"Hmph! Now you know what it's like to be on the receiving end," scoffed Bakugou without a hint of guilt or empathy - Todoroki could see that crystal clear in his crimson eyes, not just in the firm tone of his voice.

This kind of merciless brutality was what anyone could expect from Bakugou on any given day, whether they be his friend or foe. But seeing his smirking lips slightly smudged with blood made him come across not as savage but as terrifyingly sensual, as if one of the most

exquisite of rouges had been painted on him. Bakugou might not like the word, but Todoroki really did think that 'lewd' was what fit him the best. That perception was even more strongly corroborated by the way Bakugou licked his neck, cleaning the little droplet of blood oozing from the bite mark with his tongue.

That was the moment when Todoroki truly stopped being able to hold himself back. He kissed Bakugou with the hunger of a thousand, even though he could still taste the iron-like flavour of his own blood inside his mouth and on his smudged lips. That kiss was still one of the best, for both Todoroki *and* Bakugou.

His hold around his shoulders and waist might have relaxed a little bit, but Bakugou still didn't let go. Thanks to their similar heights, even their ragged breaths made it so their hard-ons rubbed against each other. It was most likely a sign they should put the foreplay aside for a little bit and dive right into the main course. Todoroki picked up where he had left off, pulling down Bakugou's pants and underwear with swift movements. His intentions were pretty self-explanatory, so Bakugou didn't need to think too hard to figure out it was time to give up on half of his hold on Todoroki and let go of his waist. That little show of cooperation really helped wrap up the undressing stage, not to mention motivating Todoroki to keep going. Not that he needed anyone telling him what to do, mind you. He vividly remembered how things had unfolded last night and knew what steps to take to get everything rolling in that same direction. As soon as clothes were officially out of his way, he reached out to his nightstand to grab the lube and the condoms stored in the drawer.

Good thing I haven't packed these yet, Todoroki commented to his own buttons as he spread a generous amount of lube on his fingers before going after the tight hole between Bakugou's buttocks once again. Unlike what had happened inside the car, he didn't hesitate to push a finger into the hole, letting the lube coat every nook and cranny of those tight, soft walls before pushing it even deeper.

"Ahh, ngh!" When Bakugou caught himself moaning at just one finger, he promptly closed his mouth more tightly, making sure none of those

embarrassing vocalisations saw the light of day. His arms were still snuggly wrapped around Todoroki's shoulders, so of course his gaze and his ears were right there, so very close to his face and his vocal cords. Who would want to make a single peep under those circumstances? "Nnngh, haa! Ahh…"

"Seeing you try your best to keep quiet only makes me want to make you even louder, Bakugou," chuckled Todoroki, modelling that sentence after what Bakugou had told him earlier at the entrance. He thrust his finger even deeper inside him, pressing it in the direction he knew would make Bakugou feel it the most. He remained stubborn at first, defying Todoroki's words with all his strength and willpower, but Bakugou couldn't hold it in any longer once a second finger was added. A small, husky moan came out and slammed the floodgates wide open, just like Todoroki had intended. For someone who was used to hearing Bakugou screaming and roaring left and right, including all sorts of expletives, it was quite the adjustment to now hear that rough, raspy voice become so erotic and enticing. It was also such a huge turn-on, in Todoroki's most honest opinion. "You really are good at seducing me…"

"Ngh… I ain't doing… anything…" gasped Bakugou, his body shivering from head to toe at the words Todoroki had whispered right next to his ear. His voice was usually so calm and emotionless, but right now, it carried an impassioned heat that made Bakugou melt into a mushy goo on the inside. He was once again being accused of seducing Todoroki, but really, Bakugou wholeheartedly felt like it was the other way around. "Ah, ngh… Todoroki… hurry up… haa…"

"Rushing me won't help," admonished Todoroki, doing his very best not to lose it completely at Bakugou's sultry pleading. He wanted nothing more than to ram it in him as is, but, at the same time, he didn't want to risk hurting him. Really, he was keeping Bakugou's best interests in mind, at the expense of keeping his extremely aroused lower half on stand-by. Wasn't that the right choice? Apparently, it was not, the way Bakugou suddenly squeezed his arms around his shoulders. "Oh."

“I know my body way better than you do. Hurry. Up. Now!” demanded Bakugou, enunciating his last words one by one to make that message as clear as possible to someone with a dense predisposition.

“Weren’t you the one saying we’re never, ever gonna sleep together again?” deadpanned Todoroki, perhaps against his better judgment. He just found it so amusing how Bakugou acted like a prude at normal moments, but was so quick to go in the opposite direction whenever his switch was flipped.

“...Forget it, I just changed my mind. Go have a great, lonely time with just your hand on the balcony, you dipshit,” grumbled Bakugou, his face promptly creasing into a pouty frown. He even turned his face away from Todoroki to prove his sulking wasn’t just for show.

“Sorry, I’m on it. But don’t complain to me afterwards, okay? I can only shoulder so much of the responsibility,” conceded Todoroki, keeping the amused chuckling to a bare minimum. He slowly removed his fingers from inside Bakugou, his soft, gooey walls clenching around him every single second of his way out. It was one of the sexiest things he had ever experienced, second only to actually having his dick inside him. Whatever doubts he had were now gone, conquered by the inviting sight of Bakugou’s body reacting to him and his sensual ministrations. Todoroki was truly on the verge of blowing up, so he appreciated that Bakugou was equally as eager and ready to go.

“What responsibility? I’m an adult, I can take care of myself just fine,” scoffed Bakugou while rolling his eyes. It seemed he and Todoroki had very different ideas of ‘responsibility’, which led to clashes at times like this: Bakugou believed in personal ownership, while Todoroki felt that he should also be responsible for the effects his actions might have on those around him. Neither ideal was right nor wrong; it was just two different flavours of the same belief. While there was some room for discussion so that neither party had to sacrifice their ideals, Bakugou also recognised that now was definitely not the right moment for it.

“Let me know if it hurts here too,” said Todoroki, adjusting the positioning of Bakugou’s legs so he could more easily slot himself between them. He heard Bakugou grumbling a ‘hell no’ right next to his ear, which was so very much like him. Admitting the aftereffects of last night on his chest probably bankrupted the ‘honesty points’ he had in stock. Todoroki could expect Bakugou to go full ‘tsun’ from here on out, most likely.

Just like before, Bakugou had to keep himself and his voice in check as he felt Todoroki’s cock go inside him and stretch his insides as much as they could go. Being fingered really was just child’s play compared to the real deal. Good thing he had a pretty great read on his own body and its condition; otherwise, things could have easily gone sideways. It was also a good thing he was holding Todoroki so close to him, as he could just kiss him whenever he felt like he couldn’t keep his voice down any longer - which happened fairly soon once Todoroki started moving.

“Ah, mmngh… haa… Mngh…!” With each thrust, Bakugou’s body was sapped of its strength and softened by the bottomless pleasure. To keep on holding onto Todoroki, he had to claw at his back, something that wasn’t all that easy with how sweaty their bodies already were. A stronger thrust was all it took for his grip to slip and his arms to fall back to the bed.

“Sorry, Bakugou, but keep up with me for a bit,” requested Todoroki, able to move a bit more freely now that Bakugou was no longer restricting him as much. He grabbed the back of his knees and pushed both of his legs down towards his torso, making Bakugou’s flexible body much more available for stronger thrusts. In this position, Todoroki could go balls deep into him, and his depleted self-restraint gave him the leeway to do so.

“Ahhh! Wai- Ahh, ngh, ahhh!” moaned Bakugou, no longer able to form complete words, let alone sentences. He was so close to climax already that his dick was dripping precum all over his stomach.

Instead of Todoroki's back, his hands clawed and pulled at the bed sheets. It all felt so good that he didn't know what to do with himself. The deeper Todoroki went, the more he poked and rubbed against the spots that could get him to come without even having to touch himself, which was exactly what ended up happening minutes later. "Ahh, Todo- Ah, ahhhh!"

"Ngh…!" Being suddenly so sweetly squeezed nearly made Todoroki also come right there and then, but he somehow managed to hold out by slamming the entire length of his cock inside of Bakugou and momentarily pausing the pounding. Not that he could move much right now, with Bakugou's insides clenching so hard due to his climax. Todoroki got some breathing room when Bakugou let his arched back fall onto the bed once again, his chest inflating and deflating in rapid succession, but his hole still felt as tight and pleasurable as before. How good it felt didn't eliminate this small nagging thought that was bringing a certain amount of annoyance into their sexual encounter, though. Todoroki hadn't even noticed it until these words were coming out of his mouth. "How many times have you done this to be able to come from just your ass?"

"Haa… Heh… Who knows…?" snickered Bakugou, his panting lips turning into a mischievous smirk at that question. That smirk was promptly wiped from his face when Todoroki pulled back almost completely and then plunged himself right back in, the slapping sound of flesh hitting flesh echoing across the room alongside the creaking of the bed. "Ahhh! Wai… Ahh, I just… came… Ahhh!"

"Since you're so used to this, that shouldn't be a problem, right?" pointed out Todoroki, not slowing down at all and instead leaning his upper body even closer to Bakugou. He wanted to kiss him some more, but that was a bit too hard to do while he was pounding him nonstop. Todoroki had to content himself with only occasionally licking and nibbling his neck or jawline.

"What… used…? Ah, this and that… ngh, are nothing, ah, alike…" rasped Bakugou with much difficulty, his words getting constantly interrupted by moans and gasps.

“Tell me what ‘that’ means, and I’ll tell you if they’re alike or not,” said Todoroki, his voice coming out more authoritative than he had intended it to. He also didn’t mean to be so rough, but he couldn’t control how annoyed that extremely ambiguous comment had made him feel. He could very well be on the cusp of finding out how Bakugou became unable to come without some backdoor stimulation, and he honestly couldn’t tell if he wanted to know the truth or not at this point. If the answer was something along the lines of ‘I’ve been sleeping around with other men’, then he didn’t want to hear it. Yeah, Todoroki didn’t want to know after all.

To make sure Bakugou wouldn’t blurt out anything, he stopped pushing the back of his knees and let his legs fall back down to the bed, even if he kept one of them hooked over his arm to make space for himself. With that, he could finally reach his mouth once again. He hungrily devoured those devilish lips, tongue rubbing against tongue as he relished such a wonderful treat.

Todoroki could also now access Bakugou’s chest, despite the previous ‘out of commission’ warning. His hand fell on Bakugou’s soft, plump pec and groped it, his hardened nipple getting squished and pinched between his index and middle fingers. Bakugou’s whole body jolted at the sudden stimulation of that exceptionally sensitive spot, his husky voice cutting through the erotic sounds their bodies produced through their joining. Touching just one of his nipples wasn’t fair, though, so Todoroki took the other into his mouth, licking and sucking on it, sometimes even nibbling and pulling it with his teeth.

“N-Not there…! Ahh! Todo- Ngh, ahhh!” Bakugou cried out, his eyes getting slightly teary from the overpowering mix of pain and pleasure. He didn’t even know if he wanted Todoroki to stop or keep going. The only thing Bakugou was sure of was that there had been a sudden shift within his ‘husband’, and he had no idea why. “Ngh, haa… Why are you… ah, getting all moody, ngh… out of the blue…?”

“It’s because you’re keeping vital information from me, and I don’t

know how I'm supposed to interpret any of that," confessed Todoroki, perhaps being a bit too frank for his own good. It wasn't as if getting on Bakugou's case would get him to speak. However, he had also unilaterally decided he was better off not knowing, so being honest about how much it bothered him was like asking Bakugou for a shovel so he could dig his own grave with it.

"Are you… ah, for real…?" groaned Bakugou, the exasperated sigh he wanted to let out turning into a shallow gasp. Todoroki bit his nipple a bit more strongly in response, so, yes, it seemed he was being for real right now. He had no idea how one thing was connected to the other, but, in Todoroki's mind, there was some sort of correlation between the two, for as nonsensical as that might sound to Bakugou.

He really didn't want to talk about this topic since, for one, he still believed that his sex life was none of Todoroki's business, even if they were currently engaging in this sort of activity with one another, but also because it was embarrassing as hell. Bakugou didn't even talk about this sort of stuff with his friends, so why would he do so with Todoroki? However, all things considered, it looked like Todoroki was going to hold this sort of thing against him whenever it was convenient for him to do so. That sounded way more troublesome and annoying than telling him the truth and being done with the whole mystery once and for all.

"It just… ngh, happened by accident…" mumbled Bakugou under his breath, his voice so small that Todoroki was forced to stop moving to be able to hear him. His already pretty reddish face went even darker, to the point that the warm, muggy air around them felt like a refreshing breeze. "It's a freaking pain in the ass, but I can't do anything about the urges I have… But since it's a pain in the ass, I want to get it dealt with as fast as possible… I don't want to waste the little free time I have with this dumb stuff… So I looked into alternative methods to get the job done… Only that I became too fuckin' good at getting the job done in this very specific way, and it became a bad habit, alright!? So yeah, hypothetically speaking, I could come with just my dick, but it takes way, way, *way* longer and doesn't feel nearly as satisfying, so not only does it eat up too much of my time, it also has a terrible return for the time investment it

requires! Happy now!?”

“.....” Despite his earlier reticence about finding out the truth, Todoroki kept quiet as Bakugou grumbled and mumbled his complaints and vexations over having a normal sex drive. It was so very much like Bakugou to not only seek the most optimal method to accomplish something, but also to naturally excel at it without even meaning to. Some people were gifted at certain things, and Bakugou turned out to be like that with ‘everything’. Compared to the worst-case scenario Todoroki had been fuming over, it was such a simple but comical explanation that he could only laugh at it. “Pffft…!”

“Ngh, d-don’t laugh…!” hissed Bakugou, his face getting so beet red that he was stumbling over his own words. Admitting something like this to someone else was a pretty big blow to his pride as a man. He really didn’t appreciate being laughed at straight to his face to boot, all while he was in the middle of getting fucked.

“My bad. I didn’t mean to laugh, it’s just… I’m a bit relieved that the cause of your peculiarities is something so dumb,” said Todoroki, gently kissing Bakugou’s forehead to calm him down a little bit.

“Stop calling it a peculiarity, damn it…!” Bakugou snapped back, despite Todoroki’s best attempt at hushing him. “And it’s not dumb, it’s human biology!!”

“Uh-huh. Of course,” Todoroki acknowledged halfheartedly, far too pleased right now to sweat the little details or stress over Bakugou’s hissy fits. Before he could bark some more at him, Todoroki kissed him and pushed his head back down to the bed. Since those bothersome questions no longer burdened him, it was plain obvious he’d be more than eager to pick up where they had left off with redoubled energy and desire. Plus, he was so very close to coming, he might as well make the most out of it.

“Ahh! Don’t try… to change the… Ahh, ahhh…!” Bakugou tried to rebuke and admonish his ‘husband’, but he was too good at playing him like a fiddle when it came to pleasure. His hissy words quickly turned into lascivious moans and remained as such, drawn out of him with every kiss, caress and thrust. Whenever he jerked off, he knew perfectly what he was doing, but when he was having sex with Todoroki, any semblance of rationality and logical thinking was thrown out of the window and locked outside without a way back in. “Ahh, Todo… roki… Haa, I’m gonna…”

“Yeah, I won’t last much longer either…” said Todoroki, taking his sweet time licking and kissing Bakugou’s neck despite his hurried words. The way he could feel Bakugou’s tight hole already starting to quiver and squeeze around him, he knew he was very close to coming once again. It was as if his body was begging him to also partake in the pleasure together with him, and Todoroki for sure would not say no to that. Todoroki buried himself inside him as deep as he could go, rubbing and grinding against all of his sweet spots. In return, he also got to enjoy his own orgasm in the confines of Bakugou’s lustful insides. “Ngh, Bakugou…!”

“Ahh, ahhh…!” Coming a second time felt so darn good that Bakugou’s mind went completely blank for a couple of seconds. He might have even forgotten how to breathe for a moment there. After that intense discharge of pleasure that got every single one of his muscles tensed up, his body went completely limp, sapped out of all strength.

“Are you still alive, Bakugou…?” asked Todoroki after taking a deep breath to even himself out. He could feel his ‘husband’ gasping for air underneath him, so he tried to somewhat adjust his position without pulling out from inside him.

“...I told you… haa… to stop asking… haa… dumb questions…” Bakugou somehow managed to grumble while greedily gulping down fresh oxygen. Once he wasn’t panting as hard, Todoroki snuggled up to him again, which Bakugou found to be suspicious at first. But all that came out of that was a couple of light pecks on his lips. That

small, insignificant in the grand scheme of things action got his heart speeding way faster than it had while he was getting railed.

“Bakugou… Sorry to inform you, but you’re doing it again…” sighed Todoroki, nearly succumbing to the strong urge to pounce Bakugou one more time. After leaning his elbows on the mattress, he captured Bakugou’s face with both of his hands. “You’re looking all cute once again. That makes it really hard to stop…”

“I-I’m not doing anything…!” yelped Bakugou in his own defence. He lifted one of his hands from the bed and lunged it towards Todoroki with the intention of pinching the back of his hand, pulling it away from his face. But, in the end, he simply grabbed it without trying to remove it from that spot. The reason being… those hands were a great cover-up for whatever facial expression he was making while saying, “...Plus, I never said we had to stop at only once…”

That single sentence got Todoroki so hard, he could have hammered nails down with his dick. Instead, he ‘hammered’ Bakugou a couple more times, to the point he started to worry about the structural integrity of his bed and whether it would last long enough until the new, sturdier one arrived.

Chapter 30

I seriously might have to kill him once this mission is over…, groaned Bakugou in the back of his mind. He was having one heck of a post-nut clarity moment, all due to the extremely embarrassing things he confessed to while having sex with Todoroki. At this point, only death could soothe his abashed soul, and he was definitely not the one who was going to drop dead. Bakugou grabbed his head while he suffocated himself face down against the pillow, all while inwardly screaming. *Screw him and his seductive schemes! I'm not falling for it ever again! My legs are henceforth closed for all eternity! The sex sprees are over! I'm going celibate, to match my future sainthood!*

"Bakugou, do you want some water too?" asked Todoroki, nonchalantly returning to his bedroom with a bottle of water in one hand, the clothes they had previously lost on their way to the bed on the other. His underwear and pants had been left right next to the bed on the floor, so he had put them on before going on his little scavenger mission.

"Only if it's holy, so I can exorcise whatever demon is making me go astray…" grumbled Bakugou after lifting his frowning face from the pillow. He nevertheless turned around and sat up on the bed, pulling the bottle from Todoroki's hand and gulping down its contents greedily. After so much exercising and sweating, of course he was parched.

"I… don't think they sell that type of water here in Japan…" hesitantly said Todoroki, a bit confused whether Bakugou had meant that figuratively or if he truly wanted to purchase holy water. Christianity didn't have a strong presence in their country, so if it were the latter, they probably would need to import it from somewhere else. Then again, Bakugou had accepted the brand of bottled water he had at home and was now drinking it. Maybe that one would do just fine, nitpicks aside. But that was besides the point. "What kind of demon are you even dealing with?"

“I’m speaking about you, you idiot,” scoffed Bakugou with a roll of his eyes. Since he had only downed half of the bottle, he screwed the cap back on and stretched himself to place it on the nightstand. “I know I’m repeating myself here, but this time for sure was the last! We’re not doing it anymore! Screw your ‘I’m taking responsibility’, I’m definitely not gonna have sex with you ever again! Are we clear?”

“The more you say that, the less believable you sound,” deadpanned Todoroki, far too used to Bakugou’s unreasonable hissy fits to mind this one too much. With how unpredictable their relationship was, he’d rather not speak in absolutes and instead leave wiggle room for whatever may come. Bakugou, on the other hand, was far too serious and stubborn for that sort of mental flexibility.

“The more *you* say stuff like *that*, the more *I* want to do the exact opposite,” Bakugou retorted back at him, his frowning features softening into a pout.

“Do you want to take a bath before you put your clothes back on?” asked Todoroki, smoothly changing the topic by placing the clothes on top of Bakugou’s lap, covered only by a layer of bed sheets.

“Isn’t that obvious?” sighed Bakugou, not even bothering to get mad for having to spell out the most logical course of action. He wasn’t about to strut about completely naked, though - not while around the half-assed moron constantly accusing him of seducing him. Bakugou picked his underwear from the small mound of clothes and put them on while still sitting on the bed… or at least that was the plan. Getting his legs in was easy peasy, but he halted all movement just before lifting his waist from the mattress. *Crap… I just found one more reason I should not hook up with Todoroki again…*

To put it bluntly, Bakugou had hit his physical limit after going at it who knows how many times two days in a row. As a pro hero, he had both stamina and built on his side. It took quite a lot to run him ragged after so many years of training and tempering his body into an

indestructible fighting machine. The same could also be said about Todoroki, of course. That could explain why they got a bit too heated up and ended up going at it hard. Several times. Non-stop. Bakugou couldn't exactly comment on how Todoroki might or might not be feeling right now, but he was both exceptionally satisfied and with half of his muscles and joints excruciatingly tired.

Damn it, that ballsy furniture store employee might have actually been right…, inwardly cringed Bakugou, cursing at both himself and his clueless 'husband'. They might not have broken any beds yet, but they could very well be in the process of doing so, if this was how his body was feeling while he was off from work. Who would have thought that sleeping together with a fellow pro hero could be so dangerous…

"Bakugou?" called Todoroki, his head slightly tilted as he continued staring at the frozen man sitting next to him. He couldn't understand why he had suddenly stopped dressing himself and had gone completely silent. "Is everything okay?"

"O-Of course everything is okay! Why wouldn't it be!?" yelped Bakugou, immediately denying whatever it might be that Todoroki was implying right now - even though he was most likely 100% correct. He hurriedly but clumsily pushed forward and pulled his underwear all the way up, all while kicking aside the bed sheets partially covering his legs.

"Do you need help getting to the bathroom?" offered Todoroki, bless his innocent, good-natured heart. He could tell Bakugou was taking his sweet time getting off the bed, even if he wasn't entirely sure why. "I can carry you there, even if you have to kick me for it afterwards."

"Do you want me to shove my entire fist down your throat too while we're at it?" hissed Bakugou in retaliation, using that burning anger and annoyance to force his body into cooperating. He stomped his feet on the floor and got up, fully ignoring the cries for mercy that his lower back and hips were shooting up his spine. Bakugou then scoffed

as he turned his back on Todoroki and marched towards the door, his movements awkwardly robotic. “Yeah, I thought so!”

Well, there’s no use pressing him for a proper answer. I’ll just keep a close eye on him for now, Todoroki sighed inwardly as he watched Bakugou slam the door shut behind himself. A muffled clattering thud followed the booming sound, which got Todoroki to raise an eyebrow quizzically. Had Bakugou slammed the door so strongly that he caused one of the nearby towers of boxes to fall? Seeing as Todoroki had randomly piled all his boxes, only putting any thought into whether they were of similar sizes, that was quite possible. *I'd better get that checked, too.*

Todoroki walked up to the door and opened it, intending to put the boxes back in place before Bakugou saw the mess and began nitpicking at it. However, he couldn’t locate any knocked-down boxes. Instead, Bakugou was sprawled on the floor in all of his half-naked glory, right in front of the bedroom entrance.

“.....I know what you’re thinking. Don’t you dare say it out loud…” grumbled Bakugou, his forehead pressed flush against the wooden floorboards. Had Todoroki not opened the door when he did, he would have just picked himself up and then dragged his useless legs all the way to the bathroom. But with him right there, there was no way he’d behave in such a pitiful manner. He’d rather stay on the floor than humiliate himself any further.

“.....” Having had his suspicions confirmed in the most unexpected of ways, Todoroki was at a loss on what to do. Should he pretend he hadn’t seen anything and go back to his bedroom, leaving Bakugou to deal with it alone? Should he pick him up and take him to the bathroom, even if he was kicking and screaming the whole way there? Should he ask Bakugou about what he wanted to do instead of deciding on his own? In the end, since he couldn’t figure out the best course of action, Todoroki reverted to the standard procedure used during official missions and team-ups. “What’s your current status?”

“…No serious or life-threatening injuries. The level of pain is beyond minimal. Everything from the waist down is out of commission at the moment, though…” mumbled Bakugou, much to his annoyance. Still, that was better than what he knew was going through Todoroki’s mind right now.

“Got it,” acknowledged Todoroki with a quick nod of his head. He then proceeded to pick Bakugou up from the floor, carrying him like a sack of potatoes under his arm.

“H-Hey! Who said you could pick me up!?” hissed Bakugou, thrashing his arms and legs around in retaliation.

“Since your lower body is out of commission, that means you can’t kick me right now, right?” pointed out Todoroki, only slightly adjusting his hold to Bakugou’s torso so he could open the bathroom door.

“Hah! You don’t want to get kicked later on, that I guarantee you!” scoffed Bakugou, briefly halting the thrashing. He didn’t want to bang any of his limbs anywhere as he was carried through the door. “When I’m forced to do that, I add interest to the kick! And that interest ain’t cheap!”

“You don’t have to act this way with me, Bakugou,” Todoroki said calmly, bringing Bakugou all the way to the bathing area itself despite the flailing and the threats. “We’re married now. My problems are your problems, and vice versa. Didn’t you even say I’d be the one dealing with everything if something were to happen to you? I’m more than willing to fulfil my duties as your husband until we get divorced. So don’t hold back and feel free to rely on me whenever you need help with something. I mean, that’s the entire purpose of us teaming up, right?”

“…The marriage is just a sham. There’s no reason to go this far when we’re alone,” grumbled Bakugou, halting all the thrashing for good and crossing his arms instead. He kept them crossed even as Todoroki lowered him and sat him down on the edge of the bathtub.

“Says the one who wanted to watch romcoms during lunch to better his acting skills as a married man,” deadpanned Todoroki as he pressed the button on the panel on the wall to get the bathtub filled with water. The way Bakugou physically cringed at his counterargument made him feel like he had won this round of bickering.

“I’m in the bathroom now, you can leave,” ordered Bakugou, avoiding eye contact with Todoroki while he shooed him away with his hand.

“For your own safety, I’d rather stick around,” said Todoroki, already in the process of closing the sliding door while still inside the bathing area. He could tell from the way Bakugou was now glaring at him that he was one or two seconds away from attacking him, possibly with an explosion. To avoid that terrifying outcome, Todoroki decided to make some conciliatory concessions. “I don’t plan to bathe you myself, don’t worry.”

“Hmph!” Perhaps against his better judgment, Bakugou decided to trust Todoroki for the time being and proceeded with his bath. He moved himself from the wall of the bathtub to the little stool beneath the showerhead. His feet were a bit unstable while he did that, but he somehow managed just fine without Todoroki’s support. He took off his underwear once again, which Todoroki made a point of carrying to the bathroom’s dry area alongside his clothes, and only then did he turn on the shower.

Bakugou had no idea how long it would take for his waist and legs to recover, since this was the first time he was experiencing something like this, but he figured a long soak in piping-hot water would help his sore muscles relax a bit more. A couple of hours of sleep was all he

needed the previous time; he could only conclude the same applied right now, too. It was far too soon for him to go to bed, though, so he would have to make do somehow until then. Hence the bath.

He was a bit suspicious when Todoroki joined in and sat next to him, but he simply started washing himself too. Bakugou's upper body and arms were just fine, even though he could feel some soreness in his back and his chest was even more weird and sensitive than it had been before this second sex marathon. However, none of that made it impossible for him to wash himself, and Todoroki seemed to acknowledge that, too. That was a huge relief for Bakugou. The last thing he needed right now was to be bathed by someone else - or better yet, by Todoroki - and add to his growing list of shameful experiences.

With that said, he quickly reached a deadlock once he finished washing his hair and had moved on to his body.

"Hey," called Bakugou, a pout back on his face. When Todoroki glanced at him while in the middle of shampooing his hair, that pout only grew more pronounced. "Turn around for a bit."

"Why?" asked Todoroki, a bit of shampoo foam falling on the wet floor when he tilted his head. When they were students living in the same dorm, they had taken baths together in the shared bath more times than he could count. In all those instances, he had never once been asked to do such a thing, not by Bakugou, not by anyone else.

"What do you mean, why…?" grumbled Bakugou, sliding the stool just a little bit further away from Todoroki. They weren't sticking super close to one another, but they still had to be fairly close to use the same showerhead. Up until this point, Bakugou had been okay with that, but he felt he needed a bit more personal space for the rest of his washing. "I want to clean myself… inside… I don't want anyone gawking at me while I'm doing that."

“It’s nothing I haven’t seen already,” Todoroki pointed out, a bit confused as to why Bakugou was acting all shy after everything they had already done. In fact, not only had he seen fingers going inside Bakugou’s butt, he had been the one putting his fingers in there, not to mention the fact that he had literally stuck his dick in him right afterwards. Which reminded him… “Oh. I always wore a condom, though?”

“Being smeared in lube down there doesn’t feel all that nice, alright!?” hissed Bakugou, clumsily and very weakly kicking Todoroki’s leg a couple of times - his lower body truly was out of commission, if his current kicks were weaker than a baby’s. “Besides, I ain’t taking any risks with your horny brain! You already accuse me of seducing you enough times when I’m doing no such thing. I’m not giving you any blatant reasons to jump me once again!”

“Fair enough,” conceded Todoroki with a disappointed sigh. He didn’t like it all that much, but he could see where Bakugou was trying to get at: it would definitely be extremely erotic to see Bakugou fingering himself, even if just for cleaning purposes. The mere sight of all the hickeys and bite marks on his neck and chest made him feel what he could only describe as butterflies flying in the pits of his abdomen. Even though he had come several times while having sex with Bakugou, he didn’t doubt the ability his lewd ‘husband’ had to turn him on to the point of getting another boner, regardless of the circumstances.

“Hurry up and turn around, then,” ordered Bakugou, urging him to get a move on already so he could end this embarrassing situation as soon as possible.

“Give me just a sec,” requested Todoroki, turning on the showerhead to quickly rinse the shampoo from his head. He had no idea how long it would take for Bakugou to finish his cleaning; he might as well make the wait comfortable for himself. Once his hair was shampoo-free, he turned his body at a 90º angle, until his back faced all of

Bakugou. “Go ahead.”

Even his cooperation is starting to annoy me… Bakugou grumbled in the back of his mind, throwing a long sidelong glance at Todoroki and his still body to make sure he was going to keep his word in the long run. Then again, this was that dense, honest-to-a-fault Half-and-Half Bastard he was dealing with here. His thick brain had no space or capacity for intricate lies and trickery - except when it came to creating plans to seduce Bakugou, of course; on that, Todoroki was as much of an evil genius as he was. *Tsk… The faster I finish this, the fewer opportunities he’ll have to jump me…*

Since there was no point in trying to predict what Todoroki was going to do, Bakugou decided to proceed on the assumption that he would stay right where he was. He planted his feet firmly on the floor and braced his legs for what was to come. Albeit unsteadily and slowly, Bakugou could get himself up from the low stool. For as long as he kept his knees locked at a certain angle, he was sure he’d be able to remain standing in the same spot without faceplanting the floor a second time.

“Are you doing okay, Bakugou?” asked Todoroki, unable to keep his curiosity and concern only to himself. Since he couldn’t look, he had only sounds to guide him. And Bakugou had been pretty quiet for a while now.

“Stop distracting me,” Bakugou hissed, lightly slapping the back of Todoroki’s head with his free hand, the other one being too busy with the cleaning. Even with his legs in as steady a position as they could be right now, that slapping motion still disrupted his fragile balance. To avoid slipping and falling on the wet tiled floor, Bakugou grabbed Todoroki’s shoulder for additional support. He was just the right height for it, and since he insisted on butting in his business, he might as well be helpful with it. “I’ve done this, like, a gazillion times. So stop worrying about me. It’s creeping the hell out of me.”

“How did you even come up with this jerking off method?” asked Todoroki next, despite Bakugou’s blatantly requesting him to shut up. In a way, he really should be stopping this conversation or else he might end up getting ‘accidentally seduced’ by Bakugou yet again, but he just couldn’t help it. Curiosity always ended up killing the cat and so on, but Todoroki was a human, so he should be a-okay for as long as he truly stopped just as things were getting a bit too risqué.

“What part of the ‘stop distracting me’ can you not understand?” groaned Bakugou, rolling his eyes at that ridiculously straightforward question. No matter how much Todoroki pestered him about it, he wasn’t about to give him the origin story of his ‘jerking off method’. It didn’t even have that entertaining of an explanation in the first place. Plus, he truly wanted to get this done and over with so he could finally relax in the piping-hot bathtub right next to him.

His hands-on experience and fixation on spending as little time on sexual gratification as possible thankfully meant he could get it all done fairly fast. Not to mention, they had done it so many times that there wasn’t that much lube left inside of him at this point. A bit of uncomfortable prodding with his fingers was all it took for his last humiliation ritual of the day to be completed. Bakugou could only sigh in relief as he let go of Todoroki’s shoulder and sat back down on the stool. He could now continue with the bathing as usual.

“Is it okay for me to look now?” Todoroki asked this time around, the use of the showerhead signalling that Bakugou was moving on to the next phase of his bath.

“Yeah, yeah, whatever,” said Bakugou quite dismissively, like he no longer cared about what Todoroki might do - which was pretty spot on. Washing his body in the same way everybody else on Earth did couldn’t be used as an excuse by Todoroki, which meant he was now in the clear. If he were jumped at this point, he could explode with Todoroki’s handsome face with a clear conscience.

…One day, I will definitely get him to tell me the whole story, Todoroki swore in the back of his mind. For now, though, he'd give up on extracting an answer from Bakugou. They were finally back to normal. He did not want to risk making things tense between them by having another argument. Besides, he had plenty of time to put all of the puzzle pieces together. There was no need to rush.

Todoroki needed to hurry up regarding one little thing, however. Specifically, he needed to keep up with Bakugou's bathing pace. With his 'husband' unable to walk very far on his own, Todoroki had basically become his legs. He wouldn't be able to get out of the bathroom and back to his bedroom, where his clothes were, without him - as such, finishing his bath at the same time as Bakugou was fundamental.

He could also tell that Bakugou was dying to take a long dip in the bathtub that had been filling up on its own for a while now. Even if Todoroki could regulate his body at will with his Quirk, he wasn't all that keen on waiting for him to be done with his relaxation time in the bathtub, soaking wet as he was. Todoroki would rather be in there with him, too. And for that, perfect timing was crucial.

His rational and preemptive planning ended up coming in clutch once the right time did come, much like Todoroki had expected. The moment Bakugou was done rinsing the body wash from every nook and cranny of his pale, smooth skin and unsteadily got up from the stool, Todoroki was right there, ready to sweep him off his feet (quite literally).

"W-Wait, what are you…!?" yelped Bakugou, completely caught off guard by Todoroki's seemingly sudden intervention. He was just going to get up and step into the steaming bathtub, something he had deemed himself capable of doing on his own. But instead, Todoroki picked him up in his arms, this time 'princess' style. Bakugou had no idea whether the reddish colour on his cheekbones was from embarrassment or rage. "I-I don't need your help to get inside the bathtub, you moron!"

“Yeah, I know. That’s not what I’m doing,” reassured Todoroki, calmly and very easily getting inside the bathtub while also carrying Bakugou. He carefully lowered him until his feet could touch the floor of the bathtub, but he didn’t fully let go of his body until both of them were neatly seated. The bathtub wasn’t that big, and it was meant for one person at a time, so they had no choice but to cram themselves in there, with Bakugou sitting in between Todoroki’s legs, his scarred back facing him. “There we go. This way, I won’t have to wait for you to finish soaking in the bath out in the cold. Oh, feel free to take as long as you want. I’m immune to heat stroke thanks to all the water-based training I did when we were students.”

“I seriously don’t get you,” tiredly sighed Bakugou, rubbing his temple with the pads of his fingers as he processed the gall of this guy. “Who would think stuffing two fairly tall adult men in a tiny bathtub is a good idea?”

“I mean, don’t couples do this sort of thing a lot when taking a bath together?” pointed out Todoroki as he adjusted his sitting position and leaned his back against the smaller lateral wall of the bathtub. That freed up some space between his chest and Bakugou’s back, which he promptly erased by circling his waist with his arms and pulling him closer, right until he was leaning against him.

“Ah, yes. Never mind. I keep forgetting you’re like this,” groaned Bakugou, dropping his arm back inside the pleasantly hot water. His goal was to relax and regain some mobility in his lower body. That meant he couldn’t afford to argue back and forth with someone as eccentric, dense and stubborn as Todoroki. He wanted to soak in a tiny bathtub with Bakugou? Sure, go right ahead. That would only make his divine retribution even sweeter later on. Having thrown the towel of his own free will, Bakugou could only half-heartedly complain about this unforeseen result, sighing, “The lights are on, but no one is ever home, isn’t that right…? What a catch I’m married to…”

"...? Aren't we home right now?" said Todoroki, slightly confused about what Bakugou meant by that second-to-last sentence. "Well, at least until our move tomorrow we are."

"One more of this and I swear I'll make you retake all twelve years of schooling…" sighed Bakugou, his head dropping backwards to Todoroki's shoulder. He was officially done with his 'husband's' dense behind for the day…

"What? Did I say something wrong?" asked Todoroki, looking downwards at the little he could see of Bakugou's face, seeking a visual clue to explain whatever the problem might be. He drew a total blank, though, mostly thanks to how cute Bakugou looked right now.

"Yeah, we are totally adding kindergarten too, just to play safe." At this point, Bakugou didn't think redoing all of his schooling could save Todoroki's brain, but it was still worth a shot, one way or another. Sarcasm aside, this type of chop logic would lead him nowhere, no matter how many times he tried. He'd rather just drop the topic right here and ignore the dense moron that was acting as a human-shaped chair of some sort. To signal he was done, Bakugou went silent after his last rebuttal and closed his eyes.

"Isn't it too early for you to go to sleep?" noted Todoroki, quickly catching on to Bakugou's unusually relaxed stance. Actually, now that he thought about it, it was also particularly unusual that he didn't retaliate against him in a more physical sense. Bakugou hadn't even pinched his cheeks! Was he really that tired?

"Yes, yes, it's way too early for that. I'm just closing my eyes for a bit," reassured Bakugou, feeling every bit like a kindergarten teacher humouring one of his pesky little brats. How very on brand for the two of them.

“You know that if you fall asleep here, I’ll have to carry you back to the bedroom, right?” asked Todoroki, snuggling his arms more closely around Bakugou’s waist. Nap or not, no one was about to drown on his watch.

“Aren’t you going to carry me there either way?” scoffed Bakugou with a dismissive shrug. Had he had his eyes open, he would have rolled them, too.

“.....” Bakugou had gotten him good with that one, that Todoroki was willing to admit. Not that he had that many complaints about any of this, whether Bakugou remained awake or fell asleep in his arms. He simply enjoyed talking with him, so if possible, he’d like to do it for as long as it could go without angering or annoying him. But if Bakugou wanted to stay silent while soaking in the bathtub, that was fine by him, too. Bakugou’s wish was his command until he was back to normal, so to speak.

“Heh, I win,” snickered Bakugou, taking Todoroki’s silence as an admission of his loss. To rub that even more on his face, he opened his eyes and glanced upwards at him, a mischievous smirk tugging at the corner of his lips.

“Why do you have to be so cute all of a sudden?” deadpanned Todoroki, using his expressionlessness in his favour to hide how much his heart had melted at the sight of Bakugou’s cute but devilish smirk. The rest of his body, however, couldn’t keep all of those gushing emotions contained. His arms hugged Bakugou tight, almost as if they were scared someone would swoop in and steal him away.

“Argh! You’re squeezing too much…!” yelped Bakugou, flailing about so much that he was splashing water all over. “You’re gonna snap my spine in two…!”

“Sorry, bear with me for a bit,” sighed Todoroki, loosening his hold on Bakugou’s body a bit while still not letting go. Since he wasn’t crushing him anymore, Bakugou stopped fussing as violently, but that was like a double-edged sword. His cuteness level rose once again, reaching heights never before seen. How was he supposed not to do something if the man he had married was this adorable when around him?

It had already been a miracle that he had somehow managed to keep it together ever since he first met Bakugou in high school. Because, no, this cuteness was not new. He had thought of Bakugou as cute since day one. But they had always been classmates, friends and, later on, coworkers. And you don’t hug and touch your classmates, friends and coworkers just because you find them to be cute, right? At the very least, that’s how Todoroki had viewed this complex conundrum his entire life. For as dense and unaware as he might be, he still had good common sense, for the most part.

However, now that they were also a ‘married couple’, albeit a fake one, Todoroki subconsciously felt like he no longer had any reason to hold back. It was okay to hug and touch one’s spouse, wasn’t it? Bakugou himself told him it was acceptable to do so, as it aided their unofficial mission. All Todoroki needed to do was find the perfect balance between the socially acceptable and how much Bakugou let him get away with.

So far, Bakugou had indulged him so much that his self-restraint was basically non-existent now.

“I’m so glad you were the person I married…” sighed Todoroki, snuggling up to his ‘husband’ by resting his chin on his shoulder. “This complicated mission just wouldn’t be the same without you as my support.”

“Yeah, yeah, I’ve heard that one already,” said Bakugou with a dismissive roll of his eyes. If Todoroki thought that getting in his good

graces would make his future punishment more lenient, he had another thing coming. Still, he wouldn't say no to getting cooed over and hearing him sing him praises. It was a far better alternative to being outright looked after and doted on like a newborn baby, unable to even walk on his own.

"Let me be your support too, okay?" requested Todoroki, a small smile on his lips as he peered sideways at Bakugou and his adorable pouting face. "I know you don't like that sort of thing, but indulge me in it, too. Plus, that will definitely make our marriage more believable, including with my father. He knows how strong and independent you are, after all."

"Hmph! I'll think about it," scoffed Bakugou, promptly turning his face in the opposite direction.

"Yeah, please do," chuckled Todoroki, quite happy and satisfied with that response. In the language of Bakugou Katsuki, hearing 'I'll think about it' was equivalent to getting a positive acknowledgement. The fact that Bakugou also hadn't put an end to the impromptu cuddling was as good as saying he was okay with it, too. Not even a week had gone by since they made their deal, but the improvement in his happiness level and quality of life was already off the charts. He'd never admit this to his father, but being married wasn't that bad a thing when done with the right person.

Now this is the perfect 5th day of our marriage, I'd say… I hope tomorrow is even better.

Chapter 31

Chapter Notes

Hello, everyone! Mafy here with the last chapter of 2025~

I hope you are enjoying the holidays and staying warm (or enjoying the hot weather, for my readers down under and in the south). It was a rough year for many and 2026 will be just as challenging, but I hope I can continue to brighten your Mondays for one more year to come <3
All the best to every single one of you! Keep on going forward, you're doing so well!

Hope you enjoy this chapter too ;3

“Alright, since you want to become my manservant that badly, I guess I have no choice but to grant you your wish,” said Bakugou, his arms crossed over his chest as he remained sitting cross-legged on the sofa. Unlike earlier, he was finally fully dressed, his spiky blonde hair still slightly damp from the long bath. Given all of the previous conversations they had had, Bakugou thought he was being pretty accommodating to his ‘husband’s’ stubborn fixations, but the blank look currently on Todoroki’s face seemed to imply the opposite. “What now!? Isn’t this what you wanted!?”

“You complain about the words I use, but your vocabulary is just as bad at times,” deadpanned Todoroki, talking back at Bakugou without a single hesitant thought. He knew this was simply how Bakugou was, and he shouldn’t mind his aggravation tactics all that much, but being called a ‘manservant’ still rubbed him the wrong way - mainly because he thought of himself as more of a doting husband rather than someone who wanted to be told what to do.

“Heh, since I can’t use my legs, I might as well kick you in the other sense of the word. Not that I expect you to know what idiom I’m even speaking of,” scoffed Bakugou, his serious demeanour promptly changing into an enticing smirk. “If you want to complain, keep it all as just thoughts. You only have yourself to blame for whatever I might do or say for the rest of the day.”

“Didn’t you enjoy your bath just fine, even with me there?” pointed out Todoroki in his own defence. The only bone he had to pick here was the title of ‘manservant’; everything else was just Bakugou being Bakugou. Since his current predicament was partially his fault, Todoroki didn’t mind helping him a bit more than usual and let him order him around to get stuff done. However, that didn’t mean he’d just roll over and blindly obey every single one of his unreasonable orders. “Actually, I’d say you only enjoyed your bath as much as you did because I was there. You almost fell asleep while we were in the bathtub, didn’t you?”

“I keep telling you I was only closing my eyes! I was awake the whole time!” hissed Bakugou, a pouty frown lightly creasing his brows. “But that’s besides the point! Are you gonna take responsibility right until the end, or are you calling it quits already!?”

“That’s an unfair way of putting it…” sighed Todoroki, unable to do anything but raise the white flag after Bakugou masterfully beat him at his own game. As expected of that evil genius… Todoroki might have to relearn how to be careful of what he said around Bakugou, because he saw any weaknesses and leeway as a ‘go-ahead’ to use said weaknesses and leeway against the speaker whenever it was most convenient for him.

“If ‘fair’ was what you wanted, you’d have married someone else, not a pro hero who is constantly being recruited by villains,” scoffed Bakugou, turning his pouty face away from Todoroki.

“True. You’re one of the few people I know who can face my father head-on and win, mostly because of how shamelessly evil and manipulative you can be,” deadpanned Todoroki, inwardly reminding himself of how easily Bakugou had defused Enji just the previous day. His father was a smart man, so it took skill and brains to be able to shut him down so swiftly.

“I keep telling you that compliments won’t take you anywhere,” grumbled Bakugou, dropping his moody body backwards until he was leaning on the sofa’s backrest. Obviously, his own denseness completely erased the backhanded subtext on Todoroki’s so-called ‘compliment’.

“So, what exactly do you want me to do?” asked Todoroki, concluding there was no way out of it now.

“Go get some things from my apartment,” said Bakugou, already fishing for his keys in his pocket.

“That’s all?” The ‘so what if it is?’ that followed left Todoroki absolutely floored. That basic, inoffensive request was the last thing he was expecting to hear. He wouldn’t blink an eye if Bakugou had given him a lengthy list of side quests he needed to go through and pass, according to his very unreasonable demands and requirements. But to send him to his apartment to grab a couple of things was just… “Did you really have to sound so evil while asking me to do something so simple? I’d do it even if you didn’t add any threats and manipulation to it.”

“Shut up… I wouldn’t have to ask you for anything if you hadn’t wrecked half of my body. So what if I want to twist you around my little finger as payback for that?” grumbled Bakugou under his breath, his pouting demeanour only getting more intense and frowny. “You wanted to make yourself useful despite being fully aware I hate that kind of stuff, right? Well, there you go. Now shut up and do it, or else I’ll add more conditions to make you as miserable as possible while you’re at it.”

“Alright, I get it. What do you want me to get from your apartment?” sighed Todoroki, choosing the non-argumentative route. If that was all Bakugou wanted, then sure, he’d go along with his evil theatrics, if that’s what made his help more palatable to this prideful, independent pro hero.

“Gimme your smartphone. I’ll write it all down so you don’t forget anything or mess up by accident,” Bakugou instructed, already motioning his hand towards Todoroki. His ‘husband’ simply sighed, grabbed his phone, unlocked it and gave it to him. Bakugou then opened the notes app and began writing down what he needed, being as obvious and specific as possible to avoid forcing anyone to take multiple trips. He also added the location of each item to save himself from constant long-distance questions. Once he was done, he returned the smartphone to its owner, alongside his house keys. “There you go. Do you have any questions before you go?”

“No, I think I’ll be fine,” said Todoroki as he quickly skimmed through the list. Everything had been written down very bluntly, with no space left for alternative interpretations. Plus, with Bakugou providing the locations for everything, he doubted he’d struggle too much completing this task, even if he wasn’t all that familiarised with where Bakugou kept his stuff in his apartment. “I’ll be going now. Let me know if you remember anything else you might also need.”

“Yeah, yeah.” With that dismissive reply, Todoroki departed on his quest, leaving Bakugou all alone in his apartment. He doubted he’d need anything else, as Todoroki’s own belongings easily bridged any gaps. That meant he could fully focus on something else while he waited for him to return. “Alright, let’s get one more thing out of the task list…”

Bakugou really, really, *really* didn’t want to, but he grabbed his phone, unlocked it and turned off airplane mode. He was immediately greeted with an endless number of pings and beeps, each one accounting for one more notification that he had been accumulating throughout the day. Knowing very well how his friends and coworkers were, Bakugou had made the unilateral decision to block all direct contact with him. However, due to being a pro hero, he unfortunately couldn’t keep it going any longer. He might be on vacation right now, but he was still on call for any emergency. No matter how much he enjoyed the silence and peacefulness, Bakugou needed to be reachable in one way or another. Seeing as Todoroki was away at the moment, he simply

had no other option.

“I can ignore this… and this… and this too…” Bakugou mumbled under his breath as he swiped away a handful of notifications - most of them were from messages being sent to either their group chat or DMs meant for him only. It was all just dumb stuff, for the most part; he could safely ignore it without future repercussions. He also had numerous missed calls, but none of them were from important people or organisations, like the hero agencies he usually partnered up with. “Ugh, no missed calls from the old hag… That means I’m absolutely screwed…”

While most people would interpret a lack of missed calls from someone as a good thing, Bakugou could only think of it as a terrible sign. He had pretty much heard nothing from his mother since the day he told his parents he was getting married to Todoroki as part of a mission. Mitsuki hadn’t agreed nor been against it back then. She was completely neutral regarding her son’s job and how he went about it. Her only condition was that she wanted to meet with the two of them after they got married, mostly for the sake of her own amusement regarding that hilarious deal. Bakugou immediately told her ‘no’, but she kept pressing him until he ultimately caved in and gave her Todoroki’s contact information. The rest was history, and no more conversations about meet-ups were ever discussed again, much to Bakugou’s relief.

However, it was undeniable that Mitsuki was extremely interested in their unofficial mission. She wouldn’t give a rat’s ass about the fact that her son was being recruited by a villain group that was basically an insane religious cult, but his getting married to placate and capture those villains more safely and easily was probably the funniest news she had ever received. Hence why her current silence was such a huge red flag for Bakugou.

It could only mean his mother was getting that satisfying amusement from somewhere else rather than directly from her son.

With his smartphone on airplane mode, Bakugou had also abstained from access to the internet. Plus, he went the whole day without checking the news a single time on the TV. He was currently as uninformed about what was being talked about today as a man stranded on a desert island with zero modern devices.

"Shit, I bet this morning's daily dose of photos broke the fuckin' internet a second time…" groaned Bakugou, tiredly dropping the back of his head against the sofa's backrest. No wonder his circus of a friend group had been calling and messaging him nonstop. He would bet that the car chase had also reached the news by now, which definitely didn't aid his case either. To top it all off, their last public appearance of the day ended with Todoroki kissing him like they were shooting a Hollywood-grade romance flick. The couple of the week couldn't get any more sensational than that. "Maybe it's time I start doing some damage control…"

They had already gotten the scandal they needed. Anymore than that would be asking for trouble.

No matter what rock someone might have been hiding under, they had definitely heard all about the marriage between two famous pro heroes. That also meant the news had already reached the main targets: the villain group after Dynamight. Bakugou hadn't seen anyone he recognised following them these past few days, and no one outside of his circle of friends and acquaintances had tried to contact him. The villain group was pretty much maintaining their distance from him.

That can only mean one of two things. Either our plan is working, and this fake marriage has 'humanised' me to the point they no longer see me as their god… or they are biding their time to make their next move at precisely the right moment…, Bakugou sighed in the back of his mind, his gaze dropping back to his phone. While he wasn't directly involved in this case, Best Jeanist had aided him considerably with a couple of things, since Bakugou was currently stationed at his hero agency. However, all he had received from him these past two days was a short and direct 'How are things going?' text message. That solidified

Bakugou's belief that the villain group hadn't tried anything yet, as Best Jeanist would let him know of the opposite right away. *Asking if he or any of his sidekicks has noticed anything would be a waste of time. I could wait for them to make a move on their own, but I hate leaving the initiative entirely in their hands. Tsk, if only there was a way to bait them into showing themselves…*

Bakugou wasn't the passive kind of pro hero who only acted once his enemy misbehaved. He'd rather preemptively eliminate a potential threat the moment he had enough evidence to warrant an arrest. He had plenty of probable cause to get the entire villain group behind bars at this point, as those currently in prison indicated. The problem was that they were annoyingly good at staying hidden. Tailing them didn't work, and all of the interrogatories he had gotten involved in only gave him more questions than answers. How could he get in contact with any remaining member when he didn't even know what exactly they were? The lunatics who revered him as a living god were turning out to be the most complex case he had ever worked on, despite all of Bakugou's best attempts at closing it once and for all.

"Well, not like I can do anything about it for now… Tomorrow is the moving day and all that…" grumbled Bakugou, feeling so damn miffed at the lack of viable strategies against that headache of a villain group. He was about to update himself with what he could already guess was a shitstorm of news articles when the screen of his smartphone suddenly changed and the whole device started to vibrate and ring. The name that had appeared on the screen got him groaning some more, but he still picked up the call. "What now?"

"Finally! It was about time you stopped ignoring the entire world!" sighed Kirishima, his voice sounding half relieved, half delighted that his buddy had at long last answered one of his calls. *"I've lost count of how many times I've called you, only to end up in your voicemail."*

"You can't take a hint and realise that maybe that means I'm not in the mood for stupid, useless and annoying chitchatting?" Bakugou retorted, his demeanour sharpening into a glare even though he was completely alone right now.

“Yeah, you don’t get to enjoy a peaceful vacation time- No, better yet, a peaceful ‘honeymoon’ after creating a whole new scandal for the second day in a row,” scoffed Kirishima. *“You two really are getting good at this ‘fake marriage’ thing, huh? Had I not known the truth, you could have fooled me with today’s bombastic articles and photos. Where did you even learn such crazy realistic makeup skills?”*

“……I’m good at everything I do,” mumbled Bakugou, not denying or acknowledging anything. Much like what had happened yesterday at his apartment, they were all better off with such convenient misunderstandings. Their friends and former classmates didn’t need to know that none of what showed on those ‘bombastic’ photos was makeup or being faked.

“Right. No matter how many times I see it happening, I still can’t help but be amazed at how skilled you are,” acknowledged Kirishima, his voice hinting he was nodding along with his words. *“It’s also impressive how surprisingly good of an actor Todoroki is. With his inability to lie and that whole expressionless demeanour thing he has going, I thought you two would get busted in record time. I can only imagine the type of torturous training you gave him to whip him into such a stellar fake husband.”*

“……Yeah,” said Bakugou, keeping his reply as short as possible. He had no problems with lying or manipulating other people. Heck, it could even be said that he got some sort of sadistic kick out of controlling the people around him like they were his exclusive puppets. However, there was a very big exception to that: Kirishima Eijirou. When faced with someone so inherently honest and loyal, not to mention wholesome and genuine to a fault, Bakugou couldn’t bring himself to be as openly evil whenever he was talking with him. Omitting certain things was as far as he could go when dealing with his sunshine-like best friend.

“What will be your next steps? I think you’ve more than met your goal of creating a big scandal,” inquired Kirishima, sounding very excited to know what kind of amusing stuff would be happening next.

“We’re moving all of our stuff to our new apartment tomorrow, so I doubt you’ll be getting any juicy news the whole day,” scoffed Bakugou, very much receptive to a non-crazy busy day after the insanity of the past two. “I just hope those annoyances keeping guard downstairs don’t bug us too much, cuz at this point, I’m more than willing to resort to violence the moment they get in my way.”

“Geez, I can see their constant presence and all of the stalking isn’t doing you any favours…,” sighed Kirishima. If this were anyone else, he’d just take it as a joke. But when it was Bakugou saying it, Kirishima just knew he was waiting for a good excuse to blow up with someone and make an example out of them. *“Todoroki better amp up his beast-keeping game, or his ‘husband’ will be spending the rest of his ‘honeymoon’ in jail…”*

“Hah, I wish him good luck with that!” snorted Bakugou, his frowning expression softening somewhat. “That dense idiot has another thing coming if he thinks he can control me. He’d be better off just following my plans.”

“And how’s that going so far?” asked Kirishima, fully aware of what kind of reply he’d be getting.

“Uuuuuuuuugh,” groaned Bakugou loudly, his shoulders slumping tiredly. “He always finds new, annoying ways to mess up either my schedule or my plans…”

“Yeah, I figured as much,” chuckled Kirishima. For as much as Bakugou wanted to impose the image of ‘I only do what I want’ on everyone around him, he was actually quite fast at folding when it came to a select few - and you guessed it, Todoroki was definitely one of the people in that small, exclusive group. *“Well, the fact that he’s still alive and in one piece after two days of this tells me both of you will be just fine in the long run. So try to tolerate the reporters and so on just for a little*

while longer. I'm sure they'll eventually give up on stalking you two everywhere you go."

"I'll just keep sending them over to you guys any chance I get…" grumbled Bakugou, feeling slightly irked at being called out like that by his friend.

"Bakugou, as your friend, I really advise you not to…" hesitantly muttered Kirishima, clearly uncomfortable about that terrifying 'punishment'. *"You know very well how prone some of us are to accidentally saying more than they should. Your evil threats have been keeping them in check, but you shouldn't abuse your good luck too much or karma will hit you twice as hard…"*

"Ugh, I know, I know," sighed Bakugou while rolling his eyes dismissively at that warning. He was also fully aware of that. He didn't need any reminders to know that he was constantly surrounded by talkative idiots. "Either way it goes, I plan on doing some damage control soon enough. It's not like those lunatics are making any moves at the moment, so I have the free time to tame those professional stalkers once and for all."

"Oh, so there are no developments on your end yet, huh…" said Kirishima, sounding equal parts disappointed and worried. *"What about Todoroki's side of the deal?"*

"Endeavor is now demanding we get our marriage annulled, or just get divorced if an annulment isn't an option anymore. I think that's answer enough," scoffed Bakugou.

"Yikes… He sure is deadset on marrying off his own son to someone of his choosing…" Kirishima cringed, feeling twice as bad about his former classmate's ongoing family feud. *"But hey, if he's demanding you get divorced, then at least that means he has finally acknowledged that you*

two are truly married. That's some progress, right?"

"It's been two steps forward and one back, but yeah, I guess," remarked Bakugou while dismissively shrugging his shoulders. "At least he's not going around spreading his conspiracy theory to anyone willing to hear him out."

"I mean, he's kinda right on that, though," pointed out Kirishima after letting out a small sigh. *"You two are basically trying to gaslight him into believing you've been secretly dating for several years now. He's as smart as he is stubborn. Of course he's going to give some pushback when you're basically trying to rewrite history."*

"Yeah, there's that too. To be honest, I highly doubt he'll be giving up on the arranged marriage tradition any time soon," acknowledged Bakugou, not sounding all that bothered by the prospect of a lengthy attrition war against the retired pro hero. "Like you said, he's deadset on marrying his son off to this hypothetical 'ideal bride' or whatever the hell he calls it."

"Hmmm… If Endeavor wants his son to be with an 'ideal bride', why don't you just become that 'ideal bride'?" suggested Kirishima after thinking about it for a couple of seconds. *"I mean, you're already an expert at housework, right? Plus, you're a high-ranking pro hero. Bickering aside, you two get along relatively well. Don't take this the wrong way, okay? But you are pretty much the complete 'ideal bride' package."*

"That's exactly what Todoroki has been telling his father, in a way…" grumbled Bakugou in a very sulky fashion. He was not happy at all to be called an 'ideal bride', even if it was meant as a compliment. "But like I've been saying, that guy is so darn stubborn. His motto is literally 'my way or the highway' when it comes to the arranged marriage tradition. No matter how many times his goddamned son tells him how perfect I am, there's zero chances of him caving in."

“If words don’t work, just show it to him?” Kirishima recommended, more as a question than a definite statement. *“If I hadn’t lived with you at the dorm for several years, I also wouldn’t believe it if someone told me about how good a homemaker you are. Besides, an image is worth a thousand words and all that. Maybe he’ll change his tune if he sees how much your fake marriage benefits Todoroki.”*

“That sounds like a buttload of work for something that doesn’t guarantee anything,” sighed Bakugou. Part of him understood why Kirishima had reached that conclusion, but much like it had happened that morning with Todoroki, he was forgetting about a crucial detail. “This deal isn’t a permanent thing, alright? We’re meant to get divorced once we’ve accomplished our individual goals. If the root cause of why Endeavor is so fixated on this arranged marriage tradition isn’t completely obliterated, he’ll go back right at it the moment our divorce papers are signed.”

“Ohhh, right, right. That’s true,” said Kirishima, seeing the error in his thought process right away. *“Hmm… Yeah, that makes things trickier. Asking you to stay married to Todoroki until his father kicks the bucket would be pretty unfair, too…”*

“Why is that always the first thought that crosses you guys’ minds?” groaned Bakugou, yet again rolling his eyes at that nonsensical suggestion.

“Sorry, that’s a pretty bad thing to wish on someone else, isn’t it?” apologised Kirishima while awkwardly laughing at the absurdity of it all. *“Well, today is just day two. You two have loads of time to figure something out. I do think you should at least discuss that thing I told you about with Todoroki. You know, showing Endeavor that his son is already married to the ‘ideal bride’ and such.”*

“.....I don’t really like that plan, though……” mumbled Bakugou under his breath. Sadly, his voice was still perfectly audible to Kirishima.

“But why? I think it’s a good way to at least get him to cool down the divorce discussions,” pointed out Kirishima, quite curious about which part of that convenient plan displeased Bakugou so much. Usually, his best friend was the type who liked to brag about and rub on other people’s faces how much better he was compared to everyone else. So if anything, proving to Endeavor that he was the superior marriage candidate would be right on brand.

“Why, you ask… I already know I’d be the superior ‘ideal bride’, why the hell do I need to compete with other people for the position?” grumbled Bakugou, spatting out those words with redoubled distaste.

“Pfft! Ahahahahaha!!” Kirishima immediately burst out laughing out loud at hearing that. He knew he probably shouldn’t, seeing as he was talking with such a moody, fussy person, but he just couldn’t help himself. *“Yeah, that sounds about right for you. Why compete when you already know you’d win, huh?”*

“If you’re just going to laugh and mock me, I’m ending the phone call,” Bakugou nearly growled, his thumb already right above the red end-call button. Kirishima’s panicked ‘wait, wait, wait!’ was the only thing that stopped him from pressing it for real. “What now?”

“Just one last thing. I’m gonna be a bit busier these next couple of days, so this might be my last chance to talk with you like this for a while,” started Kirishima as his opening, partially because he was still indecisive about whether he should say something or not. *“I know you two are pretty busy with everything that is going on, even if you’re technically on vacation right now. But since you’re so confident you’d win, you really should think good and hard about what you want to do in the future. You know, after both of you have accomplished both of your goals.”*

“Haven’t we been doing that right from the start?” Bakugou claimed right away, unable to connect the dots of what exactly Kirishima was

trying to say.

“Hmmm, maybe not in the way you need to?” said Kirishima, even he struggling to find the right words to whatever it was he wanted to tell his pal. *“Well, as you said, you’re good at everything you do, so I’m sure you’ll get there at some point. Have fun shacking up with Todoroki~”*

“The right term is cohabitation, you idiot,” sighed Bakugou, way too fed up with vocab discussions to be more emphatic with his rebuke. “And you can bet I am *not* going to be having fun living under the same roof as that trainwreck.”

“Yes, yes, whatever you say,” chuckled Kirishima, not falling for his best friend’s usual tsundere antics. *“See ya, then!”*

“Yeah, bye,” dismissively said Bakugou with yet another sigh, this time for sure ending the call. “Well, time to go back to what I was doing.”

At first, Kirishima’s cryptic words kept nagging at Bakugou’s mind, refusing to fade away. However, he soon got far too flabbergasted by what he was reading both in the news articles and on social media to have any leeway to focus on anything else.

Chapter 32

“With this, only the clothes are missing…” Todoroki muttered under his breath as he placed one more tupperware on the kitchen counter and closed the fridge’s door. He skimmed the list Bakugou had written one more time, making sure he wasn’t missing or mistaking anything. Once he was sure he had gotten everything that had been requested, Todoroki started walking towards the next section of the apartment.

Although he was very familiar with the layout of the apartment, as it was the same as his, Todoroki was extremely thankful Bakugou had included the locations of nearly everything in the list. He definitely had an entirely different organisational style, and Todoroki would have struggled quite a lot trying to figure out everything in a time crunch.

Not that Bakugou had given him a deadline or time limit to go fetch his things or anything. Todoroki simply wanted to use his time with Bakugou wisely. Just because they were about to move in together didn’t mean they’d spend the full 24 hours of every day stuck to each other. They were off from work right now, and that was the only reason why they had been able to stay by each other’s side nearly uninterruptedly since Monday morning. That would end the moment they resumed their regular work schedule as pro heroes.

“Since Bakugou asked me to bring his pajamas and a change of clothes, that means he’s planning to spend the night at my place once again, right?” said Todoroki, grabbing the set of clothes that had been left neatly folded on top of the meticulously made bed. He had the suspicion that Bakugou had only decided to stay at Todoroki’s apartment to avoid the ‘humiliation’ of being carried all the way down to his floor and apartment, but Todoroki wasn’t one to sweat the little details. It made him extremely happy and excited that he’d be sharing a bed with him again, even if simply because it was the most convenient thing to do. “We slept in my bed just fine last night, so I guess it’s possible to fit two adult men in a bed meant for one, after all.”

Sadly, that was something Todoroki knew would obviously not last for very long either. These two nights of bed sharing were an exception brought about by extenuating circumstances. Had they not had sex, he was sure Bakugou would have gone back to his apartment without any fuss. It went without saying that they wouldn't be having sex every single night once they moved to their new apartment, not with the way Bakugou was so insistent on 'never, ever sleeping together with him again'. Then again, those hissy proclamations weren't working all that well when push came to shove. There was a surprisingly high probability that they would share his new bed frequently, even when no one was over at their apartment to check if their 'relationship' was legitimate or not. It wouldn't be a daily thing, but maybe it would be (preferably) more often than his father's inspection visits.

Todoroki was stacking the requested clothes into a single pile when he felt his phone buzzing in his pocket. Thinking that it was Bakugou with a last-minute addition to the list, Todoroki answered the call without even bothering to check who the caller was. "Yeah?"

"Hi, Todoroki-kun. Sorry for calling you so suddenly once again," said Midoriya right away, his voice sounding quite apologetic and even slightly nervous. *"Is, um… Is Kacchan around right now?"*

"Oh. Midoriya," interjected Todoroki, the hand still working on the pile of clothes coming to a halt. "No, I'm alone right now. Did you need something from Bakugou?"

"No, no! I just wanted to avoid getting yelled at like yesterday, ahaha…" reassured Midoriya with an awkward laugh. *"I'm aware of how much Kacchan dislikes when other people, especially me, butt into his life, so, you know… How are things going so far?"*

"Really well," Todoroki blurted out, almost as if by reflex. There had been a few turbulent and tense moments, but now that they had

successfully patched things up, he could only classify their current status as an A+. Never before had his relationship with Bakugou been this wonderful.

"Oh, so you've made some progress with the villain group case?" asked Midoriya, his voice happily perking up at Todoroki's positive response.

"No, they haven't made any move yet," corrected Todoroki, lightly shaking his head in denial despite the physical absence of his conversational partner. "I don't think any of their members have been following us either."

"I-I see," acknowledged Midoriya, figuring he had mistaken which portion of the deal had been moving forward as of now. *"Does that mean things are a bit better with Endeavor?"*

"No, he has finally acknowledged that we're truly married, but now he's demanding we get our marriage annulled or just get divorced if an annulment is no longer possible," explained Todoroki, once again correcting his friend's misguided conclusion.

"So… there hasn't been any progress in either of your goals?" hesitantly asked Midoriya, so very confused why Todoroki would describe that big nothing as things going 'really well'.

"When you put it like that, no, there hasn't been any progress yet," deadpanned Todoroki. Perhaps to those on the outside, that sort of answer meant their unofficial mission wasn't going all that well, but Todoroki begged to differ. The progress they had made was a mishmash of things that directly influenced the viability of their mission and things that simply made things easier for both of them, on an indirect basis. Kissing and having sex wouldn't arrest anybody or get a certain stubborn old mule to give up on old-fashioned family

traditions, but it made their acting as a fake couple more natural without a doubt. “However, Bakugou is pretty happy with how his plans and schedule have been going so far. I don’t think the current lack of progress is that big of a deal.”

“Well, it’s true that you only announced your marriage yesterday. I guess it’s still too early to get any concrete developments,” conceded Midoriya after thinking about it for a while. If Bakugou was pleased with how things were going, then that had to mean everything was going according to his plan, even if no results were showing for now. *“Have you two already decided what you’ll be doing next?”*

“Tomorrow is moving day. I doubt we’ll be getting much done aside from that,” said Todoroki, verbally recalling what he remembered reading on the simplified schedule Bakugou had shown him during the previous weekend. “But I’m not so sure about the days after that. We were initially planning to move around outside and bait the journalists and paparazzi to continue following us around, to make sure the news of our marriage would reach the villain group going after him. The thing is… Bakugou is more than fed up with them already. If they keep stalking us and intruding on our plans, I don’t think I’ll be able to stop him from destroying their equipment, at the very least…”

“R-Right… That pretty much tells me that it truly was Kacchan who was driving this morning…” sighed Midoriya so very tiredly. *“I got an alert about several cars driving recklessly in that area of the city, but it was dismissed when one of the cars was tagged as one of the official vehicles from Endeavor’s agency and the other vehicles were stopped and ticketed by police officers.”*

“Yeah, that was all Bakugou,” confirmed Todoroki, softly chuckling at Midoriya’s description of the incident. “He wanted to lose everyone who was following us so our new address wouldn’t be revealed just yet.”

“I can’t believe you were brave enough to let him drive under those

circumstances," groaned Midoriya, his voice quivering a bit as past memories returned in full. *"The first and only time he was driving with me in the car during a mission was so terrifying, I swore I'd never let him drive anything ever again unless he was the only person left standing… Oh, i-it's not like he's a bad driver or anything! Kacchan is actually pretty good at it when he goes about it like a normal person. The problem is that he's too good at not crashing while driving like an absolute maniac during emergencies…"*

"Yeah, I'm also not letting him drive anymore," deadpanned Todoroki, fully in agreement with what Bakugou's own childhood friend had just confirmed for him. It was a good thing that their borrowed car belonged to his hero agency, as he could use that as an excuse as to why Todoroki had to be the one driving. No matter how good Bakugou's reflexes and reaction time might be, it was just too big a liability. The last thing Todoroki wanted was for an accident to happen and ruin everything they had built so far. "Anyway, returning to what I was saying. Since Bakugou is so tired of being followed around and having his photos taken whenever we go outside, I'm pretty sure he's already scheming something to get rid of them once and for all. I don't know if he's going to throw you guys under the bus again or not, though."

"I hope not… I'm still being stopped and questioned about my hypothetical future wedding whenever I'm doing my rounds outside…" Midoriya nearly sobbed, sounding so very tired and glum. *"With them being so relentless with their interviews and questions, it's no wonder Kacchan is already reaching his boiling point. He has never liked them much to begin with… Now that they're only going after information about his private life rather than work stuff, his tolerance and patience must be running dry. Maybe this is too much to ask of you, but please try to keep him in check, Todoroki-kun…"*

"That has always been the plan," reassured Todoroki with a resolute nod of his head. "I might not be able to fully control him, but I can make sure he at least doesn't get arrested for battery or assault."

"Ugh, now I'm twice as worried…" cringed Midoriya, his friend's words

only making him even more scared of what might occur if one of the reporters or paparazzi rubbed Bakugou the wrong way by accident. *"I really do think you two did too good a job at creating a scandal with your fake sudden marriage announcement. I nearly choked on my lunch when I was checking the news earlier today. Those photos were… s-something. As expected of Kacchan, even his makeup skills are pro-level…"*

"Makeup?" repeated Todoroki, his head tilting quizzically. "What makeup?"

"Eh?" gasped Midoriya, everything about him freezing in place - his heartbeat included.

"Eh?" Midoriya's flabbergasted interjection turned out to be fairly contagious, as Todoroki himself ended up mimicking it too amidst his own worsened confusion.

"Eh!?" His voice now akin to a strangled yelp, Midoriya once again emitted some sort of gasp. Before he officially lost his marbles, he took a deep breath and reformulated his previous sentence, turning it into a clarifying question. *"T-Those… ah, m-marks on Kacchan's… um… neck and such… That was makeup… right?"*

"No?" said Todoroki, still completely lost on what had gotten Midoriya so confused and panicky. He had always been a bit of a flinching scaredy-cat whenever his bully of a childhood friend was concerned, but this seemed to be far more severe compared to his usual reactions.

"O-Oh… I-I see…," squeaked Midoriya in a stammer, his voice cracking with such a high-pitched tone that he could very well have been going through a second puberty-induced voice change. *"Um… Question… Since, uh, makeup was not used… could I maybe ask what sort of… t-technique did Kacchan use to, um… fabricate that?"*

“Hm? I did it,” replied Todoroki, leisurely offering the answer to his friend’s flustered questioning. Since his answer was followed by silence, he figured Midoriya wanted a better, more detailed explanation, so he kept going. “I did it with my-”

“O-Okay, I get it! You can stop there! PLEASE STOP THERE, I’M BEGGING YOU…!” Midoriya yelped, already on the verge of either dropping dead out of sheer shock or accidentally summoning a certain demoniac blonde that would kill him in several different torturous ways due to knowing more than he should. He could only let out a long, relieved sigh when Todoroki stopped with his explanation halfway. *“Um… I can’t take much more of this, so I’m only going to ask you one more question… I-If you don’t mind, of course…”*

“Yeah, sure,” said Todoroki while offering a pretty laidback shrug. “Go ahead.”

“…Are you and Kacchan… d-dating now…?” hesitantly asked Midoriya, so very afraid such a question would land him in an express trip to the nearest pro-hero-grade hospital.

“No, we’re married,” declared Todoroki with the ease of someone telling a friend about the current weather.

“N-No, that’s… I mean, yes, I know that… But t-that’s not what I was trying to say…” stuttered Midoriya while inwardly groaning in exasperation. Sometimes, talking with Todoroki truly felt like speaking with someone who did not speak the same language as him. Midoriya was usually really good at explaining things to others, muttering tendency aside, but this was the type of conversational topic he truly did not know how to speak about, much less with his dense-but-honest-to-a-fault friend. He took a small break to recompose himself and choose his next words more wisely before he kept going. *“Y-You’re just pretending, right? Because of your so-called unofficial*

mission?"

"Yeah," confirmed Todoroki with one more nod of his head. "Haven't we been saying so right from the start?"

"Yes, but… If you're just pretending… then why do you need to do, um… that *for real?"* asked Midoriya, going slow and with as simple a question as possible so there wouldn't be any ground left for misunderstandings or oblivious doublespeak.

"It might be all pretending, but the marriage itself is still real, isn't it?" pointed out Todoroki, his head slightly tilted. He could hear some groaning and a loud, muffled thud coming from the other end of the phone call, which gave him the impression that his answer was not entirely satisfactory to Midoriya. "I don't know how else I can explain it to you. It's just like what we discussed last week. We got married as part of our agreement and are pretending to be in a relationship while out in public to keep our lie from being exposed. But at the end of the day, the papers we signed are still the real deal. I don't think we're doing anything that weird or bad. We're simply married. That's all."

"…Uhh, I'm starting to think none of us is mentally equipped to deal with such an advanced and tricky situation…" groaned Midoriya, raising the white flag in surrender to Todoroki's invincible denseness. While none of it was bad per se, just like Todoroki had said, it could certainly be interpreted as weird by anyone with common sense. He sighed, *"I'm pretty sure there could have been a simpler way to go about you two getting married…"*

"Oh yeah? How?" asked Todoroki, very much interested in hearing all about that so-called 'simpler way'. Rather than a response, he heard yet another thud, this one much louder.

"Todoroki-kun, I'm the one who doesn't know how else I can explain all of

this to a grown man…" whimpered Midoriya, yet again victim to his friend's oblivious brain. At this point, he might as well start communicating with him about love and romantic relationships as if he were speaking with a very young child. *"Tell me, what do couples do before they get married?"*

"There's a proposal and engagement?" said Todoroki more as a question than a reply itself. He was failing to see how that was connected to what he and Bakugou were doing, though. "But didn't we technically do that? I did suggest to Bakugou that we should get married, and after hearing my plan, he agreed to be a part of it."

"Yes, I know. That's not the point," sighed Midoriya, only just getting started with what he could guess was a very embarrassing conversation. *"What does this hypothetical couple need to do before a proposal?"*

"Be… a couple?" hesitantly answered Todoroki, not entirely sure if there were any other important milestones between the dating phase and the proposal and engagement phase.

"Yes, yes, exactly!" exclaimed Midoriya in celebration, so very relieved they were finally starting to speak the same 'language'. *"And what process is used to become a couple?"*

"A confession," said Todoroki, this time certain of the answer to this last riddle.

"Yes! That's exactly it, Todoroki-kun!" Midoriya cheered on, getting more and more enthusiastic as their conversation was herded towards the right direction. *"People confess, date, propose and then get married! Can you now see what that simpler way would be?"*

“But isn’t that double the steps of what we did?” pointed out Todoroki after briefly thinking about Midoriya’s 4-step plan - which, by the way, sounded like a whole lot more complicated and time-consuming than what they had actually done, rather than the simplified version of it that Midoriya had alluded to. A third thud ensued, yet again louder and more violent than the previous one.

“…Todoroki-kun, at this rate, I’m going to give myself a concussion. Please cooperate, I’m begging you…” sobbed Midoriya, already at death’s door after so much exasperated head-banging. *“I’m putting my life on the line by having this conversation with you… Don’t let my future suffering be in vain…”*

“O-Okay…?” acknowledged Todoroki with a healthy dose of scepticism, not entirely sure why his previous question had been so damaging to his fellow pro-hero.

“Since the indirect leading isn’t really working, I’m just going to give up and be blunt with you…” sighed Midoriya, once again raising the white flag but going about it in a different, hopefully better way. As the saying goes, if the mountain won’t come to Muhammad, then Muhammad must go to the mountain - in other words, if Todoroki had no common sense whatsoever, then common sense must be slapped into his face until he notices it’s right there in front of him. Midoriya took a deep breath and… *“JUST CONFESS TO KACCHAN ALREADY!”*

“But we’re already married,” noted Todoroki, finding this reversal in direction to be quite odd and confusing. “If we’re already on the 4th, last step, why would we purposely backtrack all the way to the 1st step? We might be able to afford to take our time completing each side of our deal, but scrapping off all the progress we’ve already made and restarting from nothing would postpone a resolution for way longer than we are comfortable with. If I hadn’t gotten married right now, I’m certain my father would find a way to get me married to someone of his choosing in record time. Plus, we have no idea what other plans the villain group has in mind to try to recruit Bakugou to their side, which might put a lot of innocent lives at risk. Didn’t I tell you all of that already?”

“It’s no use… The denseness barrier is too strong…” groaned Midoriya with a pitifully tired sigh. It seemed that even common sense baulked at the sight of Todoroki’s oblivious brain. There had to be some sort of weak spot in the denseness barrier, Midoriya was sure of that. But sadly, he had been unable to locate said weak spot so far… He sighed once again. *“I really don’t get you two… If you’re willing to get officially married to one another, can kiss in public whenever you feel like it, and can even go as far as placing such obvious marks in such an obvious place, why not just do things by the book rather than use an unofficial mission as an excuse…?”*

“I don’t think it’s an excuse, it’s just the most natural course of action,” explained Todoroki, if only so he could console(?) his frustrated(?) friend. “Like I told you before, I wouldn’t be able to do any of this stuff with anyone but Bakugou. At first, even I was a bit hesitant about whether this would work or if we were just going to bring even more chaos into our lives. But now I’m sure this was the best decision we’ve ever made. It might seem weird to you guys since you’re aware of the entire backstory, but I’m pretty happy with how things are right now. Obviously, I won’t deny that it might be hard now and then. Bakugou is a very complicated guy, and it’s not like we get along all the time. But when it comes to what we individually want, this much is good. Even if it might look like a weirdly broken affair to you, why fix something that works just fine for those involved in it? Because I wasn’t lying when I said that things are going really well. They are. They’re better than they’ve ever been before, in fact.”

“…I get it, already. You can stop bragging now,” sighed Midoriya, his voice now carrying a hint of a chuckle rather than the previous heavy exasperation.

“I’m not bragging, I’m just telling the truth,” deadpanned Todoroki with a dismissive shrug of his shoulders. “Just because you can’t marry and live together with Bakugou without getting brutally murdered two seconds in doesn’t mean I can’t do it either.”

“N-Now you are definitely bragging…!” yelped Midoriya, a massive shudder crawling up his spine at the mere thought of it. Never mind two seconds in, he’d be instantly blown apart into his individual atomic molecules if he even *suggested* such a plan to his childhood friend!

“Just a little bit, yeah,” chuckled Todoroki, all in the name of some good, friendly banter. Not that he could afford to keep it going for much longer. “Oh, I need to get going, or else Bakugou might think I’m up to no good in his apartment.”

“How did you even end up all the way in Kacchan’s secret apartment all on your own?” snorted Midoriya, not having expected that last tidbit of info in the slightest. In fact, he found that to be deeply fascinating, given that Bakugou had done such a stellar job at keeping his current address a secret from everyone and everything - yes, his stalker-ish childhood friend included. It was quite the miraculous feat, honestly.

“Oh, I guess you didn’t know either,” remarked Todoroki, pleasantly surprised to have obtained a positive answer to a question that had been floating in his mind for a good while now. Since it was just a matter of time for the cat to be out of the bag, he figured he could personally break the news to such a long-time friend of both of them. “Bakugou has been my downstairs neighbour since I moved into my apartment. He’s been living in this apartment complex for way longer than I have, in fact. I only found out about it when we started this mission, though.”

“Come again!?” Midoriya loudly squawked, the severe degree of shock perfectly inscribed in the voice Todoroki could hear coming from the other end of their phone call. Coincidence or not, that was such an unexpected plot twist. The ‘apartment below Todoroki-kun’ option had definitely never crossed Midoriya’s mind whenever he tried to solve one of the biggest mysteries regarding the newest generation of pro heroes - all done as a big pro hero nerd, not for stalking purposes, mind you.

“Since he can’t walk that far right now, I’m grabbing some things he asked for,” explained Todoroki, picking up the requested clothes and bringing them to the living room area, where the rest of the items awaited him on top of the kitchen counter.

“Eh? Did Kacchan pull his back while you were getting ready for the move or something?” inquired Midoriya, slightly surprised by yet another lore reveal. Bakugou was akin to an unstoppable war machine most of the time, but a little mishap while packing and carrying heavy boxes around was still within the realm of possibilities. Bakugou was but human, after all.

“No, it’s because we-” Todoroki stopped just as he was beginning to provide a follow-up explanation. Something was telling him he was about to make one hell of a mistake, perhaps due to his previous bad experience with sharing too much information with his father. He had just managed to make up with his ‘husband’ after a lot of struggling, so he wasn’t about to repeat the same mistake a second time on the same day. He awkwardly cleared his throat and put on what he could only describe as his best lying impersonation. “Yeah, it was something like that. We’ve been doing some… pretty intense moving preparation.”

“Be careful, okay? It would be beyond tragic if one of you got injured during your first long vacation since forever,” said Midoriya, easily guessing who and what was the (presumed) culprit of that unlucky consequence. *“Don’t let Kacchan demand impossible standards that even he wouldn’t be able to keep up with.”*

“We both did just fine, don’t worry about it,” deadpanned Todoroki, inwardly telling himself that this exchange needed to end ASAP or he might accidentally blurt out far more than he should. “I’m sure he’ll be like new come tomorrow morning.”

“Ahaha, that’s true. A bit of soreness never did and never will stop Kacchan from doing what he wants to do,” laughed Midoriya, very much

in agreement with Todoroki's declaration, especially the last one. *"Well, I won't keep you any longer. I don't want to be the reason you get a tongue-lashing."*

You have no idea how right you are, Todoroki added in the back of his mind, literally biting his tongue so he couldn't say such a thought out loud. Only once he deemed it to be safe did he open his mouth to proceed with the farewells. "Yeah. Bye then. Give my best regards to Uraraka for me."

"Will do. Likewise, give my- Uhh, actually, it's probably for the best if you don't mention any part of this phone call to Kacchan…" awkwardly mumbled Midoriya, backtracking on his initial response the moment he remembered who he was speaking of. *"Or else he'll skin me alive and then put my head on a spike as a decorative piece for your new apartment…"*

"Yeah, I won't," reassured Todoroki with a light chuckle. With that, the phone call came to a clear-cut ending. Since he had collected all of the requested items before it had even begun, Todoroki only had to store his phone back in his pocket and then find a way to carry and balance all of those things so he'd only have to take a single trip. "Okay, time to go back home to Bakugou."

It was the first time Todoroki had said such a thing out loud, but the sweetness it left behind in his tongue made him want to repeat it again and again. Fortunately, with them officially starting to live together tomorrow, he'd be able to say such a sugary-sweet sentence every single day from now on.

Chapter 33

“I’m back, Bakugou,” announced Todoroki as soon as he opened the front door of his apartment. He happily waltzed in and took his shoes off, carrying all of the requested items in his arms. Not only had he managed to complete Bakugou’s quest without any issues or problems, but he was also getting a little taste of what it would be like coming back home to his ‘husband’ every single day.

Todoroki wasn’t expecting any reply or a small celebration. He already knew Bakugou wasn’t that sort of man. However, he also wasn’t expecting to find him sitting on the sofa, a pissed-off frown on his face as he glared in his direction.

“Um… Did something happen?” Todoroki asked cautiously, walking straight towards the kitchen counter rather than to the sofa. He carefully placed all of Bakugou’s belongings on the counter, making sure none were dropped or damaged while still keeping his eyes on Bakugou.

“Care to explain this?” asked Bakugou, not even attempting to answer Todoroki’s precursive question. As he spoke, he turned his smartphone’s screen towards his ‘husband’, a certain social media post in it. The post said, ‘OMG, Shouto is going on a liking spree. He liked every single one of the photos I took of them today!’ The number of likes, reblogs and comments that single post had gotten had bumped it all the way to the trending category of that social media page. From it sprouted several others, all talking and squealing over the indirect attention they had gotten from the popular pro hero. “Why the hell are you doing needless crap behind my back?”

“Oh, this,” calmly exclaimed Todoroki, grabbing Bakugou’s phone once he walked up to him. He had no idea who the creator of the post was, but he easily recognised what they were speaking of. “When I was taking a small break from packing my things yesterday, I decided to check what sort of reactions we were getting to our marriage

announcement. While I was at it, I also went to check what kind of interaction between us was the most popular with the public, and to keep track of it, I liked all of the photos with a good approval rate. Your pinching my cheeks turned out to be the most popular one. You were absolutely right, Bakugou. That really is a great way to pass on a message to anyone who sees it."

"Argh, it's no wonder those stalking pests won't leave us alone! You've been baiting them more than what my plan dictated!" groaned Bakugou, angrily ruffling his own hair. "Stop doing stuff that isn't part of my plan!"

"I didn't think it'd be that big of a deal…" Todoroki mumbled in his own defence, returning the smartphone to its owner. "There are plenty of pro heroes that have a much bigger social media presence than me, and it hardly causes them any problems… Kaminari is a good example of that."

"That's exactly the problem!!!" hissed Bakugou, locking the phone's screen before he shoved it screen-down against the sofa's cushion. "You hardly ever use social media! But now, all of a sudden, you're liking every single photo of us that crosses your feed! Of course everyone is going to make a HUGE DEAL out of it!"

"Oh," gasped Todoroki, only now realising all of the implications behind yesterday's 'research'. His face suddenly turned more serious, brows even slightly furrowed as he softly mumbled under his breath, "What about *that one*, then…?"

"'That one'...?" repeated Bakugou, likewise scrunching up his face into an annoyed frown. "Damn it, Todoroki! What else have you been doing without telling me!?"

"Well… I didn't think it was anything all that special, so I completely

forgot about it once the matter was settled," Todoroki started explaining as he grabbed his phone from his pocket. He quickly unlocked it and opened the social media app in question. Since he had all notifications disabled (he had no interest whatsoever in social media in general, after all), they were all catapulted his way as soon as he logged back in. "Oh."

"Gimme that!" snarled Bakugou, promptly snatching Todoroki's smartphone from his hand. His jaw nearly dropped at what he was staring at. To make sure he wasn't having some sort of hallucination brought out by a mixture of stress and tiredness, he hurriedly grabbed his own phone and went to double-check everything.

"Who would have thought that defending your 'spouse' online could cause so much trouble…" sighed Todoroki, very much repenting over his prior actions. He had only tried to protect the little punishment he had come to enjoy and look forward to so much. His intention had never been to start a full-blown war on one of the biggest social media platforms in the world…

"Your social media privileges have been revoked until the end of our marriage…!" growled Bakugou, somehow managing to return the smartphone to Todoroki without first catapulting it with an explosion to the stratosphere. He had no idea how the heck he had missed this gigantic discussion that was happening in a very prolific section of social media, but that most likely only came to prove how dire things were in the little corners that Bakugou had read and combed through while waiting for Todoroki to return. In the end, it only solidified his belief that they were really in need of some damage control - starting with his own 'husband'! "If you like or publish anything else without my permission, I'll divorce you on the spot! Understood!?"

"Isn't that a bit too unreasonable?" said Todoroki instead of heaving another sigh. However, since he saw the seriousness in Bakugou's blazing crimson eyes, he had to change his tune right away, or else he'd truly be dragged all the way to the courthouse as soon as the next day. "Alright, I'll discuss all social media-related matters with you from now on…"

“Good! You just barely avoided the self-destruction of our mission!” scoffed Bakugou with a very sour voice, still reeling from that last unexpected issue. It truly was a pity he had bigger fish to fry, or else he would keep drilling into Todoroki’s head what his random social media interactions might cost them in the long run. Bakugou once again carelessly dropped his phone on the sofa and went straight for that ‘bigger fish’. “Anyway, there’s something a whole lot more important that we need to fix ASAP. As in, right fuckin’ now.”

“Oh? What is it?” asked Todoroki, head slightly tilted as he wondered what else needed their intervention on such short notice. He leaned a bit closer to Bakugou, as he was beckoning for him with his finger. At first, Todoroki was thinking that Bakugou wanted him to sit down next to him on the sofa, so he wouldn’t have to continue looking up at his standing ‘husband’. However, as soon as he was within Bakugou’s range, the upper section of his t-shirt was suddenly grabbed, and his body was swiftly grappled against the empty cushions of the sofa. “...Huh?”

It would be an understatement to say Todoroki was utterly confused about what was going on. Just what kind of issue would anger Bakugou so much that he’d pin him down on the sofa? Todoroki scavenged his memories, looking for an explanation for this sort of overreaction from his ‘husband’. It wasn’t his social media activities, and it also wasn’t due to failing the mission that had been assigned to him - Bakugou hadn’t even mentioned or checked the items Todoroki had brought him from his apartment. Aside from those things, Todoroki couldn’t think of a single reason why Bakugou would want to pick a physical fight with him as soon as he returned.

Todoroki wasn’t one to just lie still and take it, however. He used his arms to at the very least lift his upper body and peer in Bakugou’s direction. It was a bit hard for him to describe it, but the look on Bakugou’s face seemed to be equal parts annoyed and gleeful, with a pouty edge to it, as he crawled closer to him. His instinct told him to be on his guard and ready for whatever may happen, but a small part of him wanted to grab Bakugou and pull him closer instead of

patiently waiting for him to do so himself.

"Ba-" The moment Todoroki opened his mouth to ask him what was going on, Bakugou finally made a move and bridged the last few inches that were keeping them apart. His first thought was that he was about to be kissed. How could it not, given everything that had happened the past few days? However, reality was indeed a cruel mistress, and Bakugou was twice as ruthless as that. Rather than the softness of Bakugou's lips against his own, Todoroki felt the hard sharpness of his teeth sinking right into the middle of his neck, just below his Adam's apple. The pain that followed fully woke him up from the fantastical expectations he had created in his mind. "Owowow…! You're biting too hard once again, Bakugou!"

"Heh, I know. That's exactly the point," snorted Bakugou, momentarily pulling his mouth away so he could speak. Once that message was delivered, he went right back to what he had started, biting Todoroki's neck in the same spot since he still wasn't satisfied with the result.

"Ngh, how about an explanation first?" requested Todoroki, pulling his head and neck as far away from Bakugou as he could. With Bakugou right over him, the distance he had gained could be obliterated in a matter of seconds. But seconds were all he needed to get some clarity on what was happening, so long as his 'husband' cooperated.

"I'm obviously doing some damage control," sighed Bakugou with an exasperated roll of his eyes. "You want things to be fair between us, right? Well, that's exactly what I'm doing. I'm gonna make sure you'll be as big of a laughingstock as I currently am because you can't keep your stupid mouth away from my darn neck!"

"Oh." So that's what was going on, Todoroki concluded. Bakugou had probably seen the most recent photos and comments while he was going through Todoroki's previous social media 'research'. He couldn't

speak much about it since he hadn't seen it himself, but he could tell that Bakugou wasn't a big fan of it, to put it lightly. In other words, Bakugou wasn't angry at Todoroki, per se; he just wanted to be petty while putting them on equal ground. He sighed, "Do you really have to bite me, though? Can't you do it like I do?"

"Yeah, I could. But that's not really my thing, is it?" snickered Bakugou, his face finally changing into a more mischievous expression. "Haven't I told you multiple times that I'm after the horror factor? Seeing you covered in bite marks should instil fear in anyone who comes across any of our photos. That means I'll finally be free of those stupid ass comments AND the professional stalkers that won't leave us alone. It's like killing two birds with one stone, hehehe."

"I'm not a big fan of pain, though," deadpanned Todoroki, even though he knew there was no changing Bakugou's mind. He was dead set on taking his frustration out on him, probably as that promised delayed payback for the incident involving picking him up from the floor. Todoroki could see on Bakugou's face and his wicked smirk that he had no way out of this one, no matter how much he tried to sweet-talk him or compromise. Then again, just because he couldn't stop Bakugou didn't mean he couldn't do something to make things slightly better for himself. Todoroki slid his body on the sofa until he could lean his back on the armrest, which stabilised his position while still leaving himself available for Bakugou's evil plan. "Fine, do whatever you want. But I'll need something to distract myself from your painful bites."

"Hmph, good luck with that," scoffed Bakugou, promptly dismissing those last few words as just Todoroki's usual silly talking. The two bite marks he could already see on Todoroki's neck were nothing compared to what he was putting on display on his own neck. That compelled Bakugou into keeping it up, all the more so now that he had gotten his victim's reluctant consent. He wasn't going to make things easier on Todoroki just because he was being so cooperative, though. Bakugou picked another visible spot and bit him there, his teeth mercilessly sinking into his springy flesh. He wasn't biting him as hard as that first time, which ended up breaking Todoroki's skin and shedding some blood, but he made sure to gnaw on him a couple

of times to make sure it would at least leave behind some bruised teeth imprints.

“Ngh…” Todoroki softly groaned at it, his body fidgeting just a little bit at Bakugou’s ticklish warm breath. While his ‘husband’ was occupied making a chew toy out of his neck, he led his hands towards Bakugou’s thighs, fingers rustling against his clothes as they climbed all the way up to his slender waist. Todoroki might have been haphazardly lying down on the sofa, his back against the armrest, but Bakugou was more neatly positioned on the sofa, perched on all fours right above Todoroki without putting any weight on top of him. Giving him all of that freedom of movement would eventually become Bakugou’s downfall.

“Mmmngh…!” whimpered Bakugou, his voice muffled due to being mid-bite. He hurriedly removed his teeth, lips and tongue from Todoroki’s neck, a thin string of saliva breaking at the sudden withdrawal. Even his sulky frown couldn’t hide the lovely pinkish shade on his cheekbones. “Hey, I told you not to touch me there, didn’t I?”

“But it’s the perfect distraction from the pain,” pointed out Todoroki, head innocently cocked to the side as he once again pressed both of his thumbs against Bakugou’s soft nipples. As his hands were climbing higher, they had intentionally slipped inside Bakugou’s loose t-shirt, caressing the velvety sides of his torso until his thumbs had bumped against his sensitive nipples. To make his point even clearer, Todoroki slid his hands inward so they’d cup the entirety of Bakugou’s supple pecs.

“...Your horny brain has the survival instinct of a fuckin’ rock…” grumbled Bakugou, his crimson eyes tightening into a warning glare. Obviously, his idiot of a ‘husband’ didn’t take notice of that and doubled down on his endeavours, groping his chest more snuggly with his warm hands. If this was the kind of death Todoroki wanted in his obituary, Bakugou would happily oblige by also doubling down on his bites and gnawing even harder on the small chunk of skin he was squeezing between his front teeth. The jolt of pain that probably hit

Todoroki ended up getting redirected back to Bakugou, as his nipples were likewise pinched right afterwards. His arms faltered for a second, but he recovered as fast as usual. “Don’t think I’m letting you win this time around, Half-and-Half Bastard…!”

When exactly did this become a competition? Todoroki sighed in the back of his head, even though he was actually quite amused by Bakugou’s competitive streak. Turning anything into a one-on-one competition had been a feature of their relationship since day one. They had found a worthy rival in each other, creating an unspoken agreement between them that dictated that holding back was the worst kind of offence either of them could do. Todoroki hadn’t initially perceived this situation as some sort of match that needed to be won, but he was fully on board with turning into one if that’s what Bakugou wanted. One of his hands slowly moved away from him while pinching Bakugou’s nipple, pulling and stretching the rosy nub.

“Nnngh, haa…!” gasped Bakugou, the shiver that crawled up his spine making his mouth slip out from its hold to Todoroki’s skin. The neck wasn’t an area all that easy to bite into in the first place, much less with the passive-aggressive method Bakugou used as petty payback. Before Bakugou could sink his teeth into him once again, Todoroki let go of the nipple he was pulling, only to push down the hardened tip with his thumb once again. The not-too-strong but also not-too-light compression was somewhat bearable, but Bakugou couldn’t take it when Todoroki started rubbing the pad of his finger against the perky nub, nail scratching at the tip now and then. It got his whole body tingling, which made it harder and harder to focus on his actual task. He had to hurriedly grab onto Todoroki’s arm to try to pull his hand away from his chest, all while he rasped, “G-Give it a rest with my chest already! I keep telling you it feels weird there!”

“Weird doesn’t mean bad, right?” said Todoroki, chuckling a little bit at Bakugou’s aggravated frown. Even though Bakugou kept fussing about his chest, he could tell he wasn’t having an unpleasant time with it. He might call it ‘weird’ out of a lack of better words or out of stubbornness, but it was clear this sort of fondling felt somewhat good. Todoroki didn’t need to pinch and pull at his nipple and hear Bakugou moaning as a result to get a truthful response straight out of

the mouth that was biting him - but he still did it nevertheless.

“Ahh! Ngh, w-wait…” moaned Bakugou, his sole weight-bearing arm shaking underneath him. He gave a couple of feeble yanks to Todoroki’s arm, but his hand was too weakened by the ongoing nipple teasing to have any effect.

“Your reactions are always the best,” mumbled Todoroki, more to himself than to Bakugou. Rather than ‘best’, perhaps he should have gone with ‘irresistible’, because he couldn’t stay lying still any longer after seeing that softer, alluring expression his ‘husband’ got on his face whenever he was feeling too good. He let go of one of his nipples and took hold of the back of Bakugou’s neck, carefully pulling him closer so he could kiss him.

Todoroki kept on groping his soft pec, paying extra close attention to the sensitive nipple in the centre with his fingers, all while he felt Bakugou melting away with each kiss. A stronger pinch or pull meant he’d be swallowing up the lewd sounds that escaped Bakugou’s vocal cords, while rubbing and kneading the hardened nub had his sensual body trembling and fidgeting. Searching and discovering every single weak spot of the man he was now legally tied to wasn’t something Todoroki had ever thought he’d enjoy doing so much, but here he was, unable to let go and yearning for even more than he had already gotten.

I know I told him he could do whatever he wants, but this just isn’t my kind of thing either, Todoroki told himself, feeling just a tiny little bit apologetic for going back on his word. He had truly meant to let Bakugou bite him until he was satisfied with his petty payback, but he had underestimated how good he was at seducing him without meaning to. Given the circumstances, it was quite easy to make up some additional space by pushing Bakugou a bit further away from him at the same time he sat up on the sofa, always without stopping their making out for even a single second. Todoroki did have to halt the groping and nipple teasing, though. He needed both hands to grab the hem of Bakugou’s t-shirt and roll it all the way up to his neck.

“W-Wai- You’re getting too ahead of yourself aga- Argh!” yelped Bakugou, still stubbornly refusing to lose against Todoroki’s newest seductive ploy. Alas, he was at a disadvantage here. His lower body, especially his waist and legs, hadn’t fully recovered from the prior sex spree. In other words, he was quite easy to topple over when solemnly on his knees. That was the explanation as to why his and Todoroki’s positions were reversed in record time with minimal pushback from his side. Bakugou felt like his heart was about to burst out of his ribcage when Todoroki swiftly engulfed one of his nipples with his mouth, pleasure instantly shooting up his spine and spreading to every nook and cranny of his body. “Todo- Ahh, ngh, ahhh…!”

A single nibble and a bit of suckling to his hardened nipple had Bakugou crying out in rapture, his body first tensing, then going almost completely limp. Todoroki was already admonishing himself for having listened to Bakugou’s tsundere antics and refraining from touching his chest area while they were having sex. Had he known that pig-headed insistence was just Bakugou being embarrassed by how good the smallest of touches felt, Todoroki would have gone all out with it back then.

Well, better late than never, concluded Todoroki in the back of his mind, taking his sweet time licking Bakugou’s nipple from the velvety pec all the way to the hardened tip. Once that one was soaking wet from his saliva, he switched to the other nipple, where he resumed the same pleasurable stimulation. Since friction was reduced when some wetness was involved, Todoroki could be a bit rougher with his teasing without causing Bakugou any pain or discomfort. With every little pinch, pull, or rub, more and more moans and choked-up gasps came out of Bakugou’s parted lips, which in turn fueled Todoroki’s indomitable sexual appetite. This was just too good to stop or slow down.

Todoroki used the arching of his back while he was sucking on Bakugou’s nipple to pull down the waistband of his pants and underwear to his knees, freeing his hardened member in the process. It was honestly a bit of a relief to know that Bakugou was still capable

of getting a boner after they went at it like bunnies just a few hours prior. Then again, the same went for Todoroki. He had already come several times, but he was likewise pitching a tent that wanted nothing more than to see the light of day once more.

“With a sex drive like this, it’s no wonder you complain about having to find alternative methods to ‘get the job done’,” said Todoroki as he grabbed Bakugou’s cock and started slowly jerking him off. Even though he had witnessed it time and time again, he still struggled to believe Bakugou was actually this erotic and lustful underneath that moody, overly serious, and no-nonsense persona of his. Bakugou had truly done a good job at deceiving everyone who had never attempted to make a pass at him, much to Todoroki’s satisfaction and consolation.

“Hmph, you’re, haa, one to speak… demanding to get, ngh, someone ‘physically compatible’ with you… as your ‘ideal bride’...” rasped Bakugou, answering to Todoroki’s verbal teasing in kind, even though keeping his mouth well sealed would have been the least embarrassing option.

“Yeah, I guess this is yet another reason why *you* are the only ‘ideal bride’ for me,” chuckled Todoroki, the pumping motions of his hand steadily accelerating. Part of him wanted to find out how long it would truly take Bakugou to come from just the front (nipple teasing included), but he didn’t have the endurance to wait for that long at the moment. “I know you aren’t in top condition right now, but bear with me for a bit…”

“Huh…?” Before Bakugou could ask him what he meant by that, Todoroki had let go of both his chest and his cock, and used both of his hands to quickly and smoothly flip him over until he was face down on the sofa. That sudden shift was, in all honesty, pretty self-explanatory as to what Todoroki intended to do. “H-Hold on, you’re not planning on-”

“I know, I know. Don’t worry about it,” reassured Todoroki, pulling down the zipper on his pants so he could finally take out his rock-hard dick. He then adjusted Bakugou’s position, elevating his bare butt a bit more while keeping his upper legs nearly completely shut. Once he was satisfied with the results of his prep work, Todoroki leaned closer and pushed his cock into the small gap between Bakugou’s thighs. It wasn’t the same as that gooey tightness he experienced when he was inside Bakugou’s ass, but it was a good enough replacement for the time being. “I won’t put it in anymore today, so focus on coming without my dick inside of you for once.”

“Ahhh!” Todoroki’s cheeky remark came accompanied by a strong thrust that got Bakugou’s body slipping against the sofa’s cushions. In this position, he could feel Todoroki’s cock rubbing against his, which certainly felt good, but nothing that could be compared to the previous nipple teasing, let alone actual sex. “This, ngh, isn’t gonna work for me, you idiot…”

“How about giving it a shot instead of jumping straight to conclusions?” suggested Todoroki, chuckling a little bit at Bakugou’s sullen response. Even though he wasn’t actually putting it in, he had a pretty good view of Bakugou’s lewd body from this position. With his t-shirt all rolled up, his broad, scarred back was nearly fully out, his spine beautifully curved in a very NSFW manner. His slender waist looked even smaller from Todoroki’s upward angle, perhaps because his soft, curvaceous butt served as such a stark comparison to that thinness. Todoroki might have initially been in a bit of a rush, but there was always enough time to admire Bakugou’s smoking hot body. He didn’t want to leave his ‘husband’ hanging for too long, though, so he quickly ended his ogling and got down to business. “Should I keep jerking you off, or do you want me to pick up where I left off with your nipples?”

“Neither…” gasped Bakugou with a sulking tone, still feeling particularly dissatisfied with this sequence of events. He’d rather go back to what they had been previously doing, but his pride didn’t allow him to admit that out loud. It was a stubbornness quite characteristic of him, so it wasn’t fazing or bothering Todoroki all that much, if his follow-up actions were any indication. He slowly rubbed

his cock between his thighs, making sure the head kept on grinding against Bakugou's hard-on. Meanwhile, the hand that wasn't giving additional support to his weakened waist and legs went after his chest, capturing one of his nipples between its fingers anew. His body immediately reacted to it, jolting from head to toes as that lightning strike-like rush of pleasure radiated down his spine. "Ahh, ngh…!"

He really should just be honest and tell me what feels the best for him, Todoroki sighed in the back of his mind, keeping his thrusting motions steady so he wouldn't lose hold of that squishy pleasure 'button'. Each time he squeezed or pulled his nipple, Bakugou's legs would contract and tighten around his cock, which was as risky as it felt good. He got the best and most vocal reactions from him when he timed that together with the rubbing on the underside of Bakugou's aroused member, so that's what he went with. It could be a bit frustrating at times, but there was also a certain feeling of exclusivity to be able to figure out on his own what Bakugou liked the most while they were getting it on.

"Ngh, Todoro…ki… Not enough…" whimpered Bakugou, the itchy feeling of unfulfillment starting to get the best of him. As if in response, Todoroki picked up the pace once again, but that was still not good enough for him. At this rate, they'd be stuck doing this for the rest of the night, only for him to get a disappointing climax at the end. Bakugou let go of the cushion he had been holding onto for dear life and instead grabbed the hand that had been keeping his sensitive chest well occupied. Even though his body was burning hot from arousal, Todoroki's hand still felt so warm and pleasant against his own as he guided it closer to his face. He tilted and turned his head to the side, peering at Todoroki over his shoulder with direct eye contact while he gave a tentative nibble to one of his fingers. "I want more…"

"Ngh…" How was Todoroki supposed to resist such a tempting invitation? If those words alone hadn't sealed the deal, the erotic way Bakugou had licked and nibbled his finger right before putting it inside his mouth would have without a doubt. He didn't think it was possible, but his cock got even harder as Bakugou kept licking and sucking on his finger. Whether it was intentional or not didn't matter; this was exactly what Todoroki meant whenever he accused Bakugou

of seducing him time and time again. Todoroki pressed his finger deeper into Bakugou's warm, wet mouth at the same time that he added a second one. He had understood his wants and unspoken invitation loud and clear. Once Todoroki pulled his soaking wet fingers from Bakugou's mouth, he immediately brought them to the opposite end of his body and slipped them inside the tight hole between his buttocks. His hand had to stay at a pretty awkward angle, as he was keeping his dick between Bakugou's thighs, but he'd probably still be able to reach his sweet spot with his fingers. "Better now?"

"Ahh! Not… at all," denied Bakugou, even though his lewd moans indicated the opposite. He wanted to raise his upper body a bit more with his arms so he wouldn't need to be so dependent on Todoroki for stability, but his limbs felt like putty already. His body was telling him to lie there, keep his ass high up and just enjoy the wanton pleasure, and he probably would have before, but now… "Haa, Todoroki… Ngh, To… doroki…"

"Tsk, that's not fair, Bakugou…!" Jaw gritting tight, Todoroki bucked his hips forward a bit more strongly than before, which in turn forced his fingers deeper inside Bakugou. Having his name being called in such a sensual manner should be illegal, especially if his family name was the one being used. Bakugou's sultry moans mixed with the way he was also moving his hips towards Todoroki was an irresistible force of nature. His infatuation and response to Bakugou's arousing actions were so overpowering that one would think Todoroki hadn't come a single time in months.

When Todoroki pulled his fingers from inside him, Bakugou immediately turned his head towards him, his pouty lips already parted to complain at him. But before he could utter a single syllable, Todoroki grabbed his ass with both hands, his fingers sinking into his soft buttocks as he spread them and the tight hole wider. Bakugou's face went beet red instantly, a silent scream choked up in his flabbergasted vocal cords.

His voice only returned when Todoroki switched from fucking his

thighs to pushing his hard cock balls deep inside that tempting, twitching hole. He had told Bakugou he wouldn't put it in anymore today, but he really, truly could not hold back anymore. Fortunately, Bakugou's body was still fairly relaxed from all the previous stretching and lovemaking, so putting it in just like that was neither hard nor painful for either of them. In fact, Bakugou seemed to have liked it quite a lot, the way he had loudly moaned and clenched around his throbbing cock.

"Ahhh! Ah, ngh, ahh…!" The sudden escalation in pleasure nearly drove Bakugou into climaxing right away, but he had already come far too many times that day to be so quick with it. He could feel his dick twitching in anticipation, droplets of sticky precum already leaking out from the tip. Now that he was getting the real deal, it was just a matter of time. Whether his body was going to be able to last that long was a different story, though. "Ngh, ahh…"

"Haa, are you okay, Bakugou?" asked Todoroki, momentarily halting his thrusts when Bakugou's upper body once again crumpled against the sofa. Had he not been holding onto his waist while drilling into him, Bakugou probably would have slipped away by now. His 'husband' was pretty much melting into a mushy pile of goo thanks to how good Todoroki was fucking him.

"Ngh… Haa, don't… stop now…" whimpered Bakugou in between shallow gasps, his reddish cheek dragging against the cushion as he glanced up at Todoroki with his tear-stained crimson eyes. He was so, so close to another mind-numbing orgasm. This break was the last thing he wanted Todoroki to do at the moment.

"Don't forget you were the one who said so," remarked Todoroki, quickly wiping a droplet of sweat sliding down the side of his face with the back of his hand. He then pulled back right until he was about to slip out of Bakugou, only to ram his cock back in a second later. It was always such a delicacy to be in him, but knowing that Bakugou desired it just as much as Todoroki did made this act all the sweeter and more addictive. After experiencing such great sex, there was no way he'd be able to tolerate anything less than. *Ah… But at*

this rate, I might be on my way to get a sex ban too after going back on my word twice in a row…

That was a frightening thought, indeed. Bakugou wasn't one to forget any grudges he might hold, no matter how many times the other party might beg for his forgiveness and leniency. He also had a penchant for being extremely petty with his payback. Todoroki was walking on such thin ice that he could very well be on the verge of drowning. He definitely wanted to avoid such a terrifying blowback, all the more so when things were going so well between them.

Todoroki wasn't exactly in a condition that allowed him to think long and hard about how to save himself from a horror movie-esque future, though. Feeling good and making his 'husband' feel even better were the only thoughts crossing his mind on repeat. With that being the case, why not just go for it? Life had taught him that the simplest and easiest solution was, more often than not, the right way to reach a happy ending.

This time around, when Todoroki withdrew, he did so all the way. He heard Bakugou clicking his tongue in annoyance at that second uncalled-for break, but he had no time to explain. He, too, was dying to get that sugary sweet, electrifying release, after all. Rather than waste that time with more and more words, Todoroki simply grabbed Bakugou's arm and gave it a good yank. Mellowed by pleasure as he was, it was pretty easy to flip his body around once again, even though they had pretty similar builds and weights.

Once Bakugou was on his back, Todoroki immediately went back inside his tight ass, using his arms to keep his legs spread wide open for easier access. That initial thrust had Bakugou crying out from pleasure with that husky voice that never failed to turn Todoroki on even more. It was safe to say he could scratch the 'feel good' requirement from his task list, but he was far too greedy to stop at just that.

The moment both his thrusting and Bakugou's body had acclimated to that new position, Todoroki grabbed his slender waist and pulled him up until he was sitting right on his lap.

"Ahhh!" That vertical position not only made it so Todoroki's dick reached even deeper inside him, but also got it pressing down on almost every single one of his good spots. It already felt so good that moving wouldn't even be necessary to get him to come. Todoroki, though, obviously had a different plan.

"Haa, I haven't forgotten this is only supposed to be a distraction for me…" reassured Todoroki, using this little position change as a small break to catch his breath. He also adjusted the positioning of his hands, making sure they were in the right place to get Bakugou to bounce up and down as he rode his dick. "Feel free to continue biting me until you're satisfied, Bakugou."

"Ahh! Ngh, ah, you're… haa, such a… Ahh…!" grumbled Bakugou, far too busy moaning his brains out to finish that sentence. The half-assed moron he now called 'husband' was getting too gutsy for his liking and was in dire need of being taken down a peg or two. Bakugou was going to show him what happened when someone rubbed him the wrong way - which meant he was going to get back at him in the most painful, boner-killing way ever thought of by mankind!

…Or at least, that was the plan.

Right after he wrapped his arms around his shoulders, Bakugou was supposed to bite Todoroki as hard as he could on the first spot he could reach. But what he ended up doing instead was kissing him passionately, like he would drop dead if his lips weren't touching Todoroki's right that instant.

So you'd rather kiss than bite me, huh? That was the only conclusion

Todoroki could reach. He had allowed Bakugou to bite him to his heart's content, but rather than accepting that generous offer, he chose to reward him with such an intense kiss. In that case, Todoroki was going to retribute that loving display in kind with the exact same, if not even more, fiery yearning.

Todoroki had the liberty to control their pace, so of course he went for the kill right away without a second thought. Each time he brought Bakugou's body back down with the sound of flesh slapping against flesh, he could feel his tight insides clenching even more snuggly around his cock, like it didn't want to let go of him after so many interruptions. The thrusts were smaller and shallower compared to before, but Todoroki made up for it by persistently hitting the sweet spots he had already learned by heart. Plus, since Bakugou was holding Todoroki so tightly while kissing him, his dick rubbed against his stomach area each time they moved, which in turn augmented all of that pleasure even more.

Ending one more satisfying round of sex on such a sweet note brought the two of them to a climax almost at the same time, with Bakugou splattering his come all over Todoroki's t-shirt while Todoroki couldn't resist the urge to come as is, still buried inside of Bakugou's tightness.

"Ugh… Damn it…" mumbled Bakugou under his breath, still feeling so lightheaded that he had to rest his forehead on Todoroki's shoulder as he tried to catch his breath. "It hasn't even been half a day… haa… since I said I'd never… Tsk…"

"Why are you so insistent on never having sex with me ever again…?" asked Todoroki, correctly guessing what Bakugou was mumbling about. Both of them were still panting pretty hard, but he nevertheless hugged his 'husband' more closely, hoping that would incentivise him into giving him a clear, truthful answer for once. "It's not like you hate doing it with me… right?"

"...It's obviously because of the opposite of that, you idiot…"

grumbled Bakugou, slowly turning his head against Todoroki's shoulder until he could glance at him with this shy, reticent look that he had never seen before. "...You already know my body has a knack for giving preference to unusual crap in the most annoying way possible… I don't wanna get addicted to something even harder to get…"

"Oh," interjected Todoroki, his mismatched eyes opening a little bit wider in response to that surprising, but not entirely unexpected, answer. So Bakugou's issue with them having sex wasn't the act itself, but the very high risk of getting a bit too much into it. Todoroki's next words were blurted out before his brain could even finish processing all of that information. "Good. Go ahead and get addicted."

"Huh…!?" yelped Bakugou, his pouty frown getting promptly replaced by a flabbergasted blush. Surely he must have just misheard him, right? Because if not, then that was the most stupidly entitled thing he had ever been told in his entire life!

"Ah. Sorry, I misspoke," said Todoroki, almost instantly spotting the error in his ways. "I should have said, 'go ahead and get addicted to having sex with me only'."

"A-As if that makes it any better…!" stammered Bakugou, the second version of that cheeky idiot's entitlement getting him even more flustered.

"Doesn't it, though?" pointed out Todoroki, his head slightly tilted as he kept closely staring at Bakugou's adorable blushing expression. "You like having sex with me, I like having sex with you. So what's the problem with continuing?"

"Ugh…" softly groaned Bakugou, his cheekbones turning even redder and hotter. He didn't exactly have a comeback to that question…

“Plus, I’m beyond a shadow of a doubt on your side, and there’s nothing that will ever change that,” added Todoroki, wanting to pile on all of the benefits of this sort of relationship before Bakugou regained his bearings and started throwing his usual hissy fit. “If you’re going to get addicted to having sex with a man, I’m your safest option. And probably also your best option, since we’re so physically compatible. I highly doubt there’s anyone else out there who would be able to satisfy you better than I do. Also, we’re already married, so everything we’ve been doing is completely normal. Hooking up with someone else would be cheating, no matter how you look at it, so that’s obviously a big no. Oh, now that I think about it, there’s also-Mmffh…”

“I-I get it already…! You can shut up now…!” ordered Bakugou right after slapping his hand over Todoroki’s blabbering mouth. Despite being unable to speak, Todoroki’s expressionless gaze was just as loud as he kept staring fixedly at him. “Grrr… Don’t give me the ‘I wasn’t done yet’ look! I know very well you could go on and on and on! But like I keep saying, just because you could doesn’t mean you should!”

“...It’s more because I want to,” deadpanned Todoroki once he dragged Bakugou’s hand away from his mouth.

“Like I care,” scoffed Bakugou, promptly turning his head in the opposite direction. He was so ready to sulk and pout and be all huffy puffy for the next couple of hours…

“Bakugou,” called Todoroki, the usual expressionlessness in his voice thawing into a much warmer, softer tone. Perhaps curious about that slight change, Bakugou slowly, carefully turned his head back around until he was able to peek at Todoroki from the corner of his eyes. He chuckled, “I was going to say you haven’t given me an answer yet, but… I think the fact that you haven’t turned me down instantly speaks for itself.”

“Like hell it does…” grumbled Bakugou, turning his head away once again.

This time, though, he also lightly pinched Todoroki’s cheek - perhaps to distract himself from the fact that Todoroki had just read him like an open book, perhaps because he now knew Todoroki enjoyed the cheek pinching so much that he’d publicly defend it from any external interference.

Chapter 34

“Ugh… I’m so damn tired…” groaned Bakugou, sprawled face down from armrest to armrest of the sofa. “We’re supposed to be on vacation right now… Why the hell do I have to be more tired now than after an entire week of work…? Oh, I know why. It’s because YOU HAVE ZERO SELF-CONTROL!”

“Yeah, I also wasn’t counting on this,” acknowledged Todoroki, sitting on the armrest right next to Bakugou’s feet. “I’ve learned from my mistakes, though. I won’t underestimate your ability to seduce me ever again.”

“I keep telling you I’m not trying to seduce anyone, much less you!” hissed Bakugou, lifting one of his legs so he could move it sideways and hit Todoroki’s back with it. As soon as that little tap was accomplished, his leg dropped heavily on the armrest. Unsatisfied with that weakened strike, Bakugou lifted his head and looked over his shoulder at Todoroki. “And even if I was, you’re still fully responsible for how you react to it!”

“That’s true, but…” mumbled Todoroki, not all that happy for having to admit that his ‘husband’ did have a point with that one. However, that didn’t mean he would let Bakugou minimise his role in what had transpired. “Bakugou, if I had pinned you down and then bitten your neck, what would you call that?”

“Huh? Obviously you’d be jum…… Ah.” Bakugou started answering Todoroki’s silly question on a whim, but he quickly realised he should not have played along. He was too late to notice that it was a trick question meant to make him admit the majority of the blame. Bakugou immediately flexed his arms against the sofa’s cushions and sat up, his reddish cheekbones hidden amidst a deep frown. “G-Given the circumstances, my actions were totally warranted! It’s not my fault you wrongfully misunderstood that as some sort of invitation!”

He's never going to admit to any of it, is he…? Todoroki sighed in the back of his mind, quickly concluding this blame game would never come to an end for as long as his adversary was Bakugou. *Well, he does have a point about me being in full control of my reaction to how lewd he is. I guess I should just let him win this one, or else he'll go back to sulking.*

"…What now?" asked Bakugou with a healthy amount of suspicion when Todoroki suddenly slid his body from the armrest down to right next to him. They were freshly out of the 3rd bath of the day and dressed in their respective nightwear, so the likelihood of his perverted 'husband' being up to any funny business was beyond minimal. Still, being on his guard could very well be the difference between being able to walk the next day or not, at this point.

"What should we do about dinner? Do you want me to order something?" inquired Todoroki, completely oblivious to the side-eye he was receiving.

"Didn't I literally send you to my apartment to get food from my fridge?" pointed out Bakugou, giving a quick jerk with his chin to point at all of the stuff that had been forgotten on top of the kitchen counter.

"Oh. You're right," exclaimed Todoroki, his entire expressionless demeanour perking up at hearing that. After taking a quick glance at the containers on the kitchen counter, he looked right back at Bakugou, his heterochromatic eyes shining expectantly. "Are you going to let me eat with you this time…?"

"We have a deal, so I don't really have any other option, do I?" grumbled Bakugou begrudgingly. They technically might still not be living together, but they had previously agreed that he would be in charge of all of the cooking since the entirety of the kitchen belonged to him. Starting now or tomorrow didn't make much difference for

Bakugou.

“I’ll go get it all warmed up,” said Todoroki, promptly getting up from the sofa. It had been a very long time since he had last eaten anything cooked by Bakugou. When they were attending U.A. High School, there had been a few instances where they either cooked as a group or Bakugou relinquished (read: was forced to) and shared what he had cooked with his classmates. Todoroki could count with a single hand the number of times that had happened, but he still perfectly remembered how good it always was. He was positively looking forward to eating Bakugou’s home-cooked meals every single day, even if it meant he’d have a bigger grocery bill and additional household chores to take care of. *I’ve always been thankful for all of the food Mom and Fuyu-nee prepare for me, but I’d rather eat Bakugou’s food only while we’re married.* “Oh.”

“Hold it right there,” interrupted Bakugou, grabbing the back of Todoroki’s t-shirt to stop him from leaving. “Some of the stuff there needs more than just being warmed up.”

“But you can barely walk right now,” pointed out Todoroki, coming to a halt right in front of Bakugou. “Just tell me what to do, and I’ll do it. I might not be able to do anything that is considered advanced, but I can still follow simple cooking instructions.”

“Yeah, how about no?” scoffed Bakugou with a fed-up roll of his eyes. “I know very well the limits of your cooking skills and I ain’t about to gamble with my food. I will definitely not let you touch anything inside of those containers without adult supervision.”

“Fine,” sighed Todoroki, yielding against the serious expression on Bakugou’s face. “I’ll carry you there so you can personally guide and supervise me.”

“Damn it, not the picking up again…” groaned Bakugou, forcing himself to go as limp as possible as Todoroki grabbed him by the waist and picked him up from the sofa. Still, among all the different ways his ‘husband’ had carried him around today, placing him over his shoulder was the least damaging (to his pride) of them all. He just felt like a big futon airing out over a balcony’s railing, which was beyond aggravating. The fact that Todoroki had picked him up so effortlessly, with zero signs of struggling with his adult-sized weight, was also pretty annoying…

“Alright, what should I start with first?” asked Todoroki after carefully setting Bakugou down on the kitchen counter. He reached out to the food containers and slid them closer to both of them.

“These here are already made side dishes. You can pop them in the microwave or whatever after everything else is done,” Bakugou started explaining after a long, tired sigh. “The rest needs to be somewhat cooked. The prep work was all done beforehand by yours truly, so rest assured, you won’t have to use your shoddy knife skills in the slightest. All you gotta do is mix the ingredients, season them and cook them accordingly.”

“So it’s kind of a stir-fry, huh…” marvelled Todoroki as he opened the containers in question. Sure enough, all of the vegetables and meat were cut into bite-sized pieces, both portioned in different containers so there wouldn’t be any cross-contamination beforehand. “Oh, what seasonings do we need? I only have the regular stuff.”

“That’s more than fine. I wasn’t planning on making anything all that fancy on the day before the move,” reassured Bakugou as he casually shrugged his shoulders. “Plus, I’ll be sparing your taste buds until I get my new kitchen up and running. You'd better start getting used to spicier food. I’m not gonna hold back on the spices and sauces just because you’re eating it too.”

“…I’m starting to have second thoughts on our cooking deal,”

deadpanned Todoroki after a short pause to think over that frightening warning. He was usually pretty neutral when it came to the spiciness level and simply ate whatever was given to him. However, Bakugou had a somewhat alarming interest in spicier dishes, which he obviously saw no problem with turning into a mass destruction weapon depending on his mood. Todoroki had always managed to escape such punishments, but there were many a tale of Bakugou nearly offing his friends through the means of food - they'd lower their guard since Bakugou was eating the food he had made just fine, without even breaking a sweat, only for them to end up shoving their entire heads in the nearest sink and pouring water by the gallons straight into their burning mouths…

"Heh, it's too late to regret that now," snickered Bakugou, his lips curling up into a mischievous smirk. "A deal is a deal, right?"

"If I end up in the hospital or die while married to you, the members of that villain group will only want you even more," pointed out Todoroki with a nearly fully expressionless demeanour, offering his own advisory warning regarding this matter.

"Tsk… They would, wouldn't they…?" grumbled Bakugou, the evil glint in his crimson eyes promptly dimming. Maybe he'd have to hold back on the spices after all… "Anyway! You have rice and a rice cooker, right?"

"I already stored it in one of the boxes, but I can go get it," said Todoroki, already on his way to the box pile that contained nearly the entirety of his cooking items. After shifting the boxes around for a bit, he returned with the requested cooking appliance. "Here it is."

"Get some rice cooking, then," instructed Bakugou with a pointed jerk of his chin. "Make sure to cook enough rice for tonight's dinner and for tomorrow's breakfast. That will save us some time before the moving company arrives."

Having heard everything he needed, Todoroki got started with the first task preceding their dinnertime. He had prepared rice and the rice cooker at UA's dorm plenty of times, especially on the mornings when he was one of the first people to reach the communal kitchen area. White rice was also something he cooked on his own frequently now that he lived on his own, as it would be pretty embarrassing to request his mother or sister to provide him with such a simple dish, too. In other words, even though Bakugou was right there on the kitchen counter, silently judging every single step of the way, no intervention was required.

"What's next?" asked Todoroki, ready to move on to the next dish now that the rice cooker was doing its thing on its own. Rather than reply to him, Bakugou simply silently glanced at the containers and then to the stove. Todoroki didn't need to be a mindreader to figure that one out. "Is a regular frying pan good enough for it?"

"Yeah, yeah, you're good to go," sighed Bakugou, urging him to keep going with a dismissive wave of his hand. Since he wanted to make sure none of them accidentally got food poisoning or something even worse, he hopped out of the kitchen counter and unsteadily walked to the other side of the kitchen. Bakugou was going to jump on his own to sit on the counter next to the stove, but Todoroki one-upped him once again without saying a single word. He grabbed Bakugou by the waist and easily plopped him on the counter. For as patient and understanding as Bakugou might be, that was going one step too far. He promptly slapped the top of Todoroki's head. "Did I ask for help? I didn't! Don't get too ahead of yourself just because I let you come inside of me!"

"That has nothing to do with any of this…?" deadpanned Todoroki, kind of confused as to why Bakugou was bringing up something that had zero connection to cooking. This fussy pro hero's mind truly was a mystery that he probably would never be able to solve… As usual, Todoroki just sighed and moved on. "What seasonings do we need?"

“Soy sauce, mirin and oyster sauce…” grumbled Bakugou while he crossed his arms over his chest in a pretty transparent show of moody pouting. “Get the oil too while you’re at it…”

“Sorry, I don’t have mirin or oyster sauce,” said Todoroki, lightly shaking his head while he reached out to grab the bottles of soy sauce and vegetable oil from the cupboard. “Do you want me to go get them from your apartment?”

“Ugh, you truly are useless in the kitchen department,” groaned Bakugou with an annoyed roll of his eyes. When he had said that Todoroki probably had all of the basics, he had completely forgotten that he was a spoiled brat who had others cook for him outside of his kitchen. Of course he’d only have the bare minimum of seasoning around. “We can replace the mirin with water and sugar, but there’s no way we can do anything here about the oyster sauce. Don’t complain if this stir-fry doesn’t meet your spoiled taste buds’ fancy preferences.”

“Alright…” muttered Todoroki, doing as told and grabbing the sugar from the cupboard too. He would have gone to Bakugou’s apartment to fetch the missing ingredients, but apparently, his ‘husband’ didn’t want to bother with that additional trip downstairs. Perhaps he was feeling too hungry for the extra minutes it would add to the dinner preparation, something Todoroki could sort of relate to. The lunch he had eaten was completely gone from his system after so much ‘bed tumbling’. He might have fully satiated his sexual appetite, but the regular one was yet to be quenched.

With the matter regarding the seasoning sorted out, Todoroki began cooking the pre-cut ingredients in the order Bakugou had instructed him to. With a stir-fry basically being cooked by simply moving the ingredients around inside a frying pan, Todoroki thought it would be a dish much easier to successfully complete compared to the pot of curry he had previously made. But the more he stirred the half-cooked vegetables and meat in the pan, the moodier Bakugou’s facial expression became.

Am I doing something wrong…? Todoroki wondered in the back of his mind, his heterochromatic eyes switching between glancing at Bakugou and peering down at the frying pan several times. When he found no discernible answer to that question, he tilted his head. What exactly could be bothering the 'cooking expert' so much?

"Argh, I can't watch this anymore!" yelped Bakugou, physically and mentally reaching his limit. He promptly jumped out of the counter and pushed Todoroki out of his way with his sore hips, all while also snatching the wooden spoon from his hands. "I won't let you murder my ingredients a second time by crushing them into mush! You seriously need to do something about that annoying monstrous strength of yours!"

"I-I'll try to be gentler with the food…" reassured Todoroki, one of his hands lingering behind Bakugou's back in case his legs buckled once again while he tried to grab the wooden spoon with the other.

"You had your chance and failed miserably at it! I'm taking charge from here on out!" snarled Bakugou, moving the wooden spoon in the opposite direction, out of Todoroki's reach. "You said you wouldn't underestimate my non-existent seduction skills ever again, but what you really shouldn't be underestimating is my stamina and durability! As if I'm going to let your stupidly high sex drive ruin my dinner!"

"That would sound more believable if your legs weren't trembling like leaves in the wind already," deadpanned Todoroki, briefly glancing down at Bakugou's shaky knees.

"You must be hallucinating! Not even a wrecking ball could topple me over!" scoffed Bakugou, stomping his feet on the floor, one at a time, to force his legs into following through with his boastful statements.

“You’re too stubborn for your own good,” sighed Todoroki, yet again capitulating to his ‘husband’s’ grim determination. There was obstinate, and then there was whatever it was that powered Bakugou Katsuki through even the smallest and pettiest of perceived challenges and fights. Nothing that Todoroki could say or do would get him to give up on the tough-guy act and let him rely on those close by offering their help.

Since it was improbable that Todoroki would be able to convince Bakugou to let him take over cooking again, he would be better off acting one-sidedly and then dealing with whatever hissy fits came his way after the fact.

“H-Hey! What the heck do you think you’re doing…!?” yelped Bakugou, his body flinching to a halt when he felt Todoroki’s arms wrapping themselves around his waist once again. “You better not be thinking about forcibly dragging me away from the stove!”

“I’m not. I’m just making it easier on you to keep standing,” explained Todoroki, carefully pulling Bakugou’s body up just a tiny little bit. On the outside, there had been hardly any change to his stance - Bakugou’s feet were still securely planted on the floor, and he remained standing in front of Todoroki like at the start. However, his legs had completely stopped shaking, as a big portion of Bakugou’s weight was now being sustained by Todoroki’s hold on his waist. “See?”

“Tsk… Make sure you don’t get in the way of my hands and arms…” grumbled Bakugou, still feeling very much suspicious of Todoroki’s true intentions. He cautiously picked up where the disaster chef had left off, keeping a close eye on the idiot right behind him while he tried to salvage the vegetables that hadn’t been turned into pulp yet. The aroma of the food exploded exponentially when he finally added the half-baked seasoning he had available at the moment, its sizzling tickling their hunger even further.

“For such a violent person, you really are good at the little details,” blurted out Todoroki, closely observing the way Bakugou was distributing the least damaged vegetables into a more even and thinner layer so they’d finish cooking at the same time as the mushed ones. As he spoke, Todoroki casually dropped his chin on top of Bakugou’s shoulder and let it rest there, even though that made it harder to hold him up. “No matter how much I train, I still can’t do small, detailed stuff with either my Quirk or my hands.”

“Yeah, I can tell,” snorted Bakugou, very much in agreement with that self-assessment. Todoroki certainly wasn’t built for any sort of meticulous work, the way he brute-forced himself into a win in nearly all facets of his life. He could be careful and gentle at times, especially when he was doing so conscientiously (much like he was doing right now by holding Bakugou up), but the smallest of emotional changes could and did ruin it, at times with tragic repercussions. “I should consider myself lucky for still having my body mostly intact.”

“Says the one constantly begging for more,” deadpanned Todoroki, even though one of his eyebrows was slightly arched. “Actually, you were even more into it whenever I was a bit rougher.”

“Like hell I was…” mumbled Bakugou, lightly kicking Todoroki’s leg with his heel. That response and the pinkish sulking expression on his face ended up earning him a tighter squeeze from the arms wrapped around his body. “Hey, mind your strength. I want my organs to stay inside my body, not all over our dinner.”

“Oh, sorry,” apologised Todoroki, promptly doing as told and relaxing his arms to the same prior position. “Maybe it would be safer if we didn’t talk about such things while I’m holding you like this.”

“Heh, now I want to talk about it even more,” snickered Bakugou, mischievously smirking to himself while he turned off the stove. “The threat of receiving a point-blank explosion to the face should help you improve your control over your monstrous strength faster than any

training methods you've tried before."

"I don't think that would end up going the way you are expecting it to," Todoroki pointed out, not falling for Bakugou's provocative teasing. For as good as his 'husband' might be at goading and baiting others to act and react the way he wanted them to, Todoroki was usually far too calm (and sometimes too dense) to be affected by it. That was why most of their arguments to date had been a very one-sided ordeal.

"From personal experience, the ones who think they can't be manipulated or deceived by me always turn out to be the easiest ones of the whole bunch," casually remarked Bakugou with a small shrug of his shoulders, having been able to read what Todoroki was currently thinking just by the expressionless tone of his voice. He scooped up a small chunk of red bell pepper from the frying pan with the wooden spoon and brought it closer to his mouth, blowing on it for a bit to cool it down before giving it a little taste. "Hm, could be better, but it is what it is."

"Can I try some too?" asked Todoroki, already lifting his chin from Bakugou's shoulder to better position himself.

"Grr… No complaining, alright?" grumbled Bakugou, sideways glaring at Todoroki's face and his already open mouth. The little nod Todoroki gave him in acknowledgement was so annoying that it got the insides of his chest feeling all warm and ticklish - the fact that Todoroki was sticking to him like glue in the middle of a hot, stuffy summer must have been at fault for those uncomfortable sensations, that much was obvious to someone as smart as Bakugou. He scooped up another small piece of bell pepper from the pan and immediately stuffed the whole thing inside Todoroki's mouth.

"Mmgh!" Todoroki wouldn't have been able to say what was worse: the piping hot bell pepper burning his mouth or the thick, solid wooden spoon halfway down his throat… Mostly because he was

unable to speak with that big spoon lodged inside his mouth, but that was besides the point. He was only able to hurriedly chew and swallow that small chunk of food once Bakugou yanked the spoon out of his mouth. "...Why didn't you blow on it like you did before? It's still too hot to be edible… I think it even burnt my tongue a bit…"

"See? I told you those who think they can't be deceived are the easiest targets of them all," snickered Bakugou, quite pleased with the result of that last-minute 'teaching moment'. Since he was done with that wooden spoon, he placed it down on the counter next to the stove and tapped on Todoroki's arm. "The cooking is done for today. Bring me back to the sofa and then get started with setting the table and heating the side dishes. Also, once the rice cooker is done, don't forget to fluff the rice and turn on the keep warm mode. That will keep the rice in pristine condition until tomorrow mor- ARGH…!"

"You're being all cute again, Bakugou," sighed Todoroki, his arms reflexively squeezing around Bakugou's torso, right below his ribcage, by the sound of the choked-up squeak he had let out mid-word. He had to tell himself that something even better awaited him afterwards to get his body to cooperate with him and let go of Bakugou. That release was extremely short-lived, as Todoroki pounced on him once again as soon as they were facing one another. Obviously, he was unable to resist the temptation and smooched the pouty lips of his adorable fake spouse. "It had been a while since I last kissed you. Thanks for reminding me of it by acting so cute."

"I told you to stop calling me- Waah!" Bakugou was going to rebuke Todoroki for his crappy vocabulary for what felt like the millionth time, but his words were cut short yet again by him picking him up from the floor. At first, Bakugou thought that Todoroki was going to place him over his shoulder, just like before. But he simply carried him all squished against his chest, his feet suspended just a couple of inches from the floor. Thanks to that awkward position, Todoroki had to take tiny steps in quick succession, all due to how little space there was between their legs.

At any other moment, circumstance or universe, Bakugou's first and

only thought would have been a fed-up ‘What the heck is this moron even doing?’ But right now, at this exact instance, his reaction ended up being the total opposite.

“Pfft! Ahahahaha!” Bakugou burst out laughing, the mental image he had of this scene tickling at his funny bone relentlessly. “‘The hell? You’re so freaking lame, Todoroki! Ahahahaha! Oh, how I wish someone could take a photo of this one. It would shatter your ‘princely’ aura for all eternity. Your fanclub of rabid fangirls would weep if they saw your true, uncool self! Ahahahahahaha!”

“I’m carrying you to the sofa like you asked, though?” said Todoroki, confused as to what was amusing Bakugou so much, but still going out of his way to store away his laughter in his special Bakugou-exclusive memory corner.

“More like, you’re scurrying away like a cockroach, hehehe,” snickered Bakugou, not being very successful at keeping his laughs in check. Maybe if Todoroki stopped being so pitifully lame, he’d be able to calm down. With that in mind, Bakugou placed his arms around Todoroki’s shoulders for additional support and bent his lower legs upwards to create some extra space for his ‘husband’s’ hilariously short steps.

“Since you’re starting to enjoy being carried around the apartment, should I take the long route to the sofa and do some scenic stops elsewhere first?” deadpanned Todoroki, abruptly taking a left turn just as he was reaching the sofa. He half meant what he had said, half was being as petty as Bakugou usually was for getting called a ‘cockroach’… No, perhaps it was more 75% the former and 15% the latter, with Todoroki also leaning towards enjoying this sort of silly transportation method in his own way.

“Don’t push it,” scoffed Bakugou, lightly tugging at a few strands of hair from the back of Todoroki’s head as a warning. “Just like I punish those who cross me, I also reward those who do their job well

handsomely. Keep working hard as my slave for the day, and I'll let you have something real nice afterwards."

"That sounds too good to be true, coming from you," chuckled Todoroki, nevertheless turning once again and resuming his shuffle walk to the sofa.

"How sad, my own 'spouse' doesn't trust me," sighed Bakugou, his voice dripping with sarcasm and fake dissatisfaction. The phoney mask cracked fairly fast, though, and was swiftly replaced by his usual mischievous smirk. "Wanna get a little taste of it in advance?"

I have no clue which kind of answer would be the safest, was what Todoroki was planning on saying had Bakugou not made a move before he could. They were already right next to the sofa, as his living room wasn't that big, so it wasn't that dangerous even when Bakugou purposely leaned his upper body backwards while continuing to hold onto Todoroki's shoulders.

With that said, Todoroki instinctively would rather err on the side of safety. To accommodate Bakugou moving around without any prior warning, he shifted his centre of gravity to make sure his 'husband' wasn't dropped on the wrong spot once again. A single fall to the floor would end very badly for Todoroki; as such, he wanted to avoid that scenario at all costs.

Once Bakugou was safely delivered to the soft cushions of the sofa, Todoroki let out a small sigh of relief. Now, he had the time and the leeway to deal with Bakugou's playful question. Or so it was supposed to be… Even after having sat Bakugou down on the sofa, he still wasn't letting go of his shoulders, leaving Todoroki at this very awkward bent forward angle. He quizzically tilted his head, silently staring right back at Bakugou's crimson eyes while waiting for an explanation of some sort.

“Heh. Here ya go, your oh so favourite cheek pinching,” snorted Bakugou, the corners of his smirking lips curling even further. His hands finally parted from Todoroki’s shoulders, only to take hold of his warm cheeks. He gave them a good pinch, not too strong, just the bare minimum to allow him to stretch his cheeks outwardly a bit.

I can’t say this isn’t a good tentative reward, but it doesn’t quite match the amount of work I’m putting into being his ‘slave’…, Todoroki deadpanned in the back of his mind, his face becoming even more expressionless despite his currently misshapen cheeks.

“Yeah, yeah, this is just the regular cheek pinching, I know,” acknowledged Bakugou with a roll of his eyes, having easily guessed what was currently going through Todoroki’s mind with just a single glance at his bank facial expression. “But this is supposed to be a little taste test of the good stuff, right? You’re not getting the whole thing until you’re done being the replacement for my legs, hehehe.”

I still can’t tell if he’s just teasing me or if he really means it, sighed Todoroki to his own buttons, finally able to straighten up his upper body now that Bakugou had let go of his reddish cheeks. Knowing the man he had married, there was a pretty big chance of that ‘reward’ coming wrapped in one hell of a catch-22…

However, Todoroki was definitely curious about what sort of thing he’d be earning if he did a good job as Bakugou’s temporary legs. Quite a lot of possibilities were crossing through his mind, a portion of them being NSFW things he wouldn’t be able to say out loud. But in all honesty, even a simple ‘you did well’ said alongside one of Bakugou’s gorgeous smiles would make Todoroki’s day.

“C’mon, hurry up and get back to work,” instructed Bakugou, pointing at the kitchen area with a small jerk of his chin, completely unaware of how motivated and excited he had just gotten his ‘husband’.

“Okay,” said Todoroki with a small nod. Before he walked back to the kitchen, he took a quick stop by the TV, turned it on and brought the remote controller to the sofa. “Feel free to watch some TV while I get the rest of the dinner ready.”

“...Yeah, I guess I should at least continue updating myself on today’s news,” grumbled Bakugou, part of him itching to also return to the kitchen and do something more productive than just lounging on the sofa. Unfortunately, doing that would require quite a lot of support from Todoroki, and he was honestly starting to hit his limit on how useless and powerless he could be.

Pleased with that answer, Todoroki promptly turned around on his heels and returned to the kitchen. Since their apartments were designed with an open kitchen plan, he could and did glance at Bakugou now and then as he followed his previous instructions to a T. He also caught Bakugou doing the same a handful of times, possibly because he was so bored with just sitting still while Todoroki took charge of the rest of their dinner preparations. Todoroki could have come up with a task that Bakugou could help him with while sitting on the sofa, but it was far too funny and precious to see him being so unusually fidgety.

This was something he was learning on the go, but Todoroki appeared to have a liking for taking care of Bakugou, even though he was so bad at looking after himself. He was fully aware of how much Bakugou liked his independence and abhorred the idea of depending on someone else when he could do nearly everything on his own. Being a team player was something Bakugou had always struggled with to begin with, even as a high school student. He might have learned along the way how to be more cooperative with those around him, especially during his work hours as a pro hero, but he still gave preference to doing things solo more often than not.

Perhaps that was why Todoroki was enjoying himself so much lately. Bakugou Katsuki, the one and only Dynamight, was actively relying on him for something that could only be classified as an ‘unofficial mission’. To top it all off, he was now also relying on Todoroki for

things that were clearly outside of the scope of even that very lukewarm label. It was a very surreal experience, and Todoroki was over the moon happy that he was the one in charge of such an exceptional role. The feeling of fulfilment it gave him was simply indescribable, all the more so for something so new and experimental. It ultimately filled his head with thoughts such as how to do a good job to meet Bakugou's expectations or how not to stomp all over his finicky boundaries.

As such, time went by in the blink of an eye, with those happy thoughts and thrilling future expectations keeping Todoroki extra motivated. Despite no longer having his dining table available due to the move, he came up with a make-shift table by stacking a few solid boxes right in front of the sofa, at the ideal height for them to eat there sitting. Todoroki then brought the food in batches, some in plates, others still in the containers he had warmed them in. Bringing the rice cooker with him, too, would have been silly and against Bakugou's instructions, so he piled some of the rice in two bowls and brought them to their DIY table.

"Am I missing anything?" asked Todoroki, standing right next to their wonderful dinner. He wasn't used to setting the 'table' like this for two people and, as such, decided to seek the opinion of a far more experienced homemaker. Since Bakugou didn't complain about anything, Todoroki took that as a confirmation that everything was okay and sat down on the sofa next to him. "Is there any news of interest today?"

"No, not really. The country is as peaceful and safe as I left it," said Bakugou with a small shrug of his shoulders. "They did briefly mention our little morning 'race', though. Glad to know those bastards got what was coming for them with those chunky traffic citations. Now they will definitely think twice about stalking us all day long."

"I'm not sure if that will be that big of a deterrent to the most seasoned paparazzi," pointed out Todoroki, giving one of the pairs of chopsticks to Bakugou, alongside his bowl of piping hot rice. "Not only are they stubborn to a fault, but they also hold grudges for a long

time. I bet some of them will not stop until they can find some dirt on us or something."

"I already took that into account when I was creating our plan for this mission," reassured Bakugou. His first bite of the rice alone fully unleashed the floodgates of his hunger. He reached out for a big serving of the stir-fry with his chopsticks, which he then placed on top of the rice so nothing would fall on him or the sofa. "With the additional security measures our new place has, we will be untouchable. I mean, those professional stalkers have spent the last few years trying to gather any sort of dirt on me, and they didn't get a single scoop out of it. I'm not about to let them win any time soon, if ever. Plus, I think I've come up with the perfect way to end our paparazzi problems permanently."

"Does it involve anything that might land you in jail?" asked Todoroki, expressionlessly staring at Bakugou as he also started to eat his dinner. "If it does, that's a 'no' from me."

"As if, you moron," sighed Bakugou with a dismissive roll of his eyes. "We'll be busy the entire day tomorrow with the move, so I'll fill you in when it's time to enact the plan. It'll be a pain in the ass, but no one will end up hurt, except for a few egos."

I still have my doubts about that, but I'll let it slide for the time being. Since there was no use in stressing over Bakugou's future evil plans while in the present, Todoroki decided to leave that matter untouched for now. He'd have plenty of time to pull the brakes if his 'husband' went too far or too crazy with his ego-crushing ploy. Now, all he had to do was enjoy his dinnertime with Bakugou. "You said it wouldn't be anything all that special without the complete seasoning, but I think this dish came out pretty good."

"Hah! I wanna hear you say that again once you taste its true version," snorted Bakugou, proudly sticking his chest out while he munched on some more of the incomplete stir-fry. "Don't think my

food is still on the same level as when we were in high school. My cooking skills have reached a god-like tier thanks to all the hands-on experience I've gained ever since I started living on my own."

"Will I be able to make requests?" asked Todoroki, his head fully turning towards Bakugou immediately, like a hunting dog that had just spotted its next prey. With them being in the middle of summer, it was now the perfect season of the year for his favourite food (not that the ever-changing seasons had ever stopped Todoroki from eating it). If regular cold soba was already so good he'd eat it for all meals of the day if he could, then cold soba cooked by Bakugou would maybe get him to reach dietary enlightenment.

"It depends," said Bakugou, carefully studying Todoroki's expressionless excitement. "If you're going to treat me like your personal chef, I'm going to tell you to fuck off. Don't forget I have the exact same job as you, including the same limited time off. I'm not about to spend it busting my ass in the kitchen for someone else. Anything that takes longer than one hour to make will get an instant 'no'. It's a different story if it's something that I can leave in the stove or oven without supervision while I'm doing other stuff, though."

"Got it," acknowledged Todoroki with a quick nod of his head.

Everything Bakugou had said sounded very fair and appropriate for the kind of deal they had made. He recognised that cooking was a skill that required a lot of time and practice to master and reach a level as high as Bakugou's, all the more so when done by someone with such a hectic work schedule. Actually, Todoroki would go as far as to say that the lack of time was precisely why he didn't bother with truly learning such a skill.

Bakugou had already agreed to cook for him, for the low price of dishwashing and half of the grocery bill. Asking him to make elaborate, time-consuming meals on top of all that was simply unthinkable.

“Ah, in that case…” mumbled Todoroki under his breath when a certain idea popped up in his mind. He pondered it as he slowly ate his dinner, the sound of the ongoing news report fading to just background noise. After much thought, the only conclusion he could reach was: why not? “Bakugou.”

“Hm?” Hearing his name being called, Bakugou promptly parted his gaze from the TV screen and glanced sideways at Todoroki.

“We should go on a proper date,” announced Todoroki as he reached for one of the side dishes Bakugou had made ahead of time. “Not like the last-minute shopping date we went on yesterday so I could buy a bigger bed. I mean a through-and-through, day-long date.”

“Huh…?” That statement had been dropped on his lap so suddenly and casually that Bakugou could only let his jaw drop wide open, his chopsticks frozen in midair while his heartbeat decided to try to break the sound barrier without his consent.

“Tomorrow would be impossible since it’s moving day, but…” said Todoroki, carefully thinking over their limited options in terms of time frame and availability. “All of the usual places get too crowded and busy on Friday and the weekend, so... What do you think about Thursday? We should be able to finish moving in just a single day, right?”

“Ah…” For what felt like the first time in his entire life, Bakugou found himself slightly tongue-tied. There was no reason for him to be rendered speechless. They were simply talking about their ‘mission’, just like they had done pretty much every single day since they made their deal. But despite knowing all of that…

“Oh, if you want to continue following your schedule as it currently is, we can save that for another time,” Todoroki added, interpreting Bakugou’s silence as disapproval towards that change in their plans. It had been a one-sided spur-of-the-moment suggestion, after all. It also wasn’t a very pressing matter, so they could easily postpone it until a day when the two of them had the same time off from work - something that would become increasingly more frequent thanks to their intention of matching their work schedules as closely to one another as circumstances allowed them to.

“N-No, Thursday’s fine… I guess…” mumbled Bakugou, his answer leaving him more confused than reassured. Why the heck was he even hesitating or getting all flustered in the first place? He could have just as easily turned down Todoroki and insisted they keep following the schedule as planned, too. To kick himself out of this dumbfounded spell, Bakugou loudly cleared his throat and continued scarfing down his dinner while talking. “Why do you even want to go out to begin with? Doing this and that either in the morning or afternoon, I get it. But the whole day?”

“I don’t know, it just feels right,” said Todoroki with a light shrug of his shoulders. “Besides, being on vacation like this is pretty rare. We might as well use this opportunity to do things we normally wouldn’t or couldn’t do on our usual single day off.”

“Yeah, I guess you have a point there…” grumbled Bakugou, that confusion making a mess out of his innards calming down considerably. It made total logical sense to make use of the full week off they had managed to arrange after three years of working almost non-stop. Maybe Todoroki had just tripped him up a bit by mistakenly calling it a ‘date’, just that. Actually, it could only be that! Hadn’t he done the same thing while they were shopping for the new bed? This was simply dense Todoroki Shouto being dense Todoroki Shouto. Why let it bother or faze him? No, he wasn’t even bothered or fazed! No way, no how! He was just having an overblown reaction because of Todoroki’s constant poor choice of words! Yeah, that had to be it!
……*Damn it, now I’m feeling kinda pissed off…*

“Let me know if there’s anything you want to do in speci-” Relieved that his suggestion had actually been approved despite it being against all odds, Todoroki wanted to dive right in and make more detailed plans, as he was aware that Bakugou would rather keep things clean and precise whenever it concerned their unofficial mission. However, he was interrupted mid-sentence by the sudden pinching of his cheek. “…? Ba’u’ou?”

“We can talk about this once we’re done with the move. Now shut up and eat your dinner,” ordered Bakugou, his frown deepening a bit more as he squeezed and pulled Todoroki’s cheek.

“I can’d ead wike dish…” deadpanned Todoroki, his words coming out even weirder thanks to all of the movements being forced on half of his face.

“Deal with it,” scoffed Bakugou, resuming his dinner like normal while his other hand kept a good hold on Todoroki’s cheek.

He had no idea what or why, but that seemed like a suitable punishment for whatever it was that Todoroki had done to annoy him so much.

Chapter 35

“It’s so damn hot already…” grumbled Bakugou first thing in the morning, right after opening his eyes at the exact same hour of nearly every single day. It was early in the morning, he was dressed lightly, and the bed sheets were also thin - that meant the cause of the hotness was something else entirely.

Ultimately, it was most likely the fact that he was crammed together with Todoroki in a bed meant for one adult only. It would be a bad idea to leave the AC running while they slept, so they had turned it off when they went to bed. Little by little, the bedroom’s temperature rose to nearly what the outside world was suffering from. Adding that to the pro hero (whose Quirk was literally half fire) who was lying down right next to him, no space whatsoever keeping their bodies separate… Of course Bakugou had woken up in a stuffy cocoon of warmth.

This should be right up my alley in the winter, though… Bakugou added in the back of his mind, taking his sweet time bringing his entire body to full wakefulness. Despite the steaming circumstances, he snuggled up to that source of warmth and soaked up the soothing heat for a few more seconds. That was a risky move, as his still sleepy brain was getting cajoled into going back to a second slumber. ……*YEAH, AS IF!*

Thanks to that inner wake-up call, Bakugou opened his crimson eyes wide open, his whole body jolting into action. He carefully pushed the bed sheets away from his upper body while he sat up on the bed.

“…’the hell is this arm doing here…?” mumbled Bakugou under his breath, even more carefully removing Todoroki’s arm from on top of him. His ‘husband’ sure was gutsy, if he thought that getting all handsy with him would be forgiven just because he did it while unconscious. Fortunately, Todoroki was out like a light and didn’t notice all of that movement going around right next to him. In a

matter of seconds, Bakugou was fully free from his clingy clutches.

He tentatively stretched his upper body while still seated, testing the waters before he committed to standing up. There was a lingering soreness here and there, but nothing compared to the restrictive heaviness of the previous night. Sleep was truly akin to a healing potion for the human body. Bakugou was 99.9% like new after simply getting his required 8 hours of peaceful sleep.

With that being the case, Bakugou decided to get his day started like normal. He was an early sleeper and early riser for the most part, only requiring some additional sleep after a particularly intense day or late nights. Todoroki, on the other hand, was just like everyone else and could sleep at completely random rates. He had been dragged to bed much earlier than usual since he had insisted on going with Bakugou, but he probably hadn't fallen asleep as fast as he had. Todoroki would most likely continue sleeping for as long as no one or nothing woke him up.

That was more than okay for Bakugou. They had plenty of time until the moving company rang their doorbell, and without his dense 'husband' around, Bakugou would be able to do what he could not the previous day freely and at his own pace.

After a quick stop by the toilet, Bakugou made a beeline to the kitchen, wanting to get the breakfast started.

"For as chaotic as he might be, at least he knows how to follow orders," mumbled Bakugou while taking a peek inside the rice cooker. There was enough steaming rice for a two-person breakfast, plus some leftover rice for something else. "Hm… Maybe I should do something for later, too. That would save us some time and help us finish the entire move in a single day…"

That sounded exactly like the plan they should be aiming for. If they finished the whole move today, that would leave them completely free for the remainder of their vacation. That was extra time they could then invest in their 'mission', be it by doing some investigation on the villain group headhunting him, or by trying to convince Todoroki's father that their fake marriage was actually real. It would also mean they'd have the leeway to deviate from the initial schedule that Bakugou had created and go on the day-long date that had been suggested the previous night…

"Wait, that makes it sound like I actually want to go on that stupid 'date'…!" yelped Bakugou, suddenly slamming the rice cooker shut. He had zero interest in Todoroki's spur-of-the-moment outings, regardless of their objective. Plus, by his own admission, even Todoroki had said it was just something that he had suggested because 'it felt right'. It didn't have any actual purpose; it just so happened to be something that did align with their overall unofficial mission. Still grumbling to himself, Bakugou exited the kitchen area, grabbed the keys Todoroki had left on top of the counter and headed straight to the front door. "I couldn't care less about that 'date' thing… We shouldn't even be calling it a 'date' when it's nothing more than yet another whimsical decision entirely made up by that moron's dense brain… I want to get things done ahead of time because that's just the type of lifestyle I have… It has no connection whatsoever to whatever might or might not happen tomorrow… I'm just doing what I always do, just that…"

Now that he was fully aware of how bare Todoroki's kitchen truly was, Bakugou had no choice but to take a trip to his apartment one floor below. He wasn't going to make things harder than they should be by needing to come up with fitting substitutions when he already had everything he needed. So he went back to his apartment and grabbed the missing ingredients he would need to make their breakfast, plus something that could be easily and quickly eaten at their new apartment. Bakugou had long finished his packing, save for the essentials, so he could afford to spend the next hour or so in the kitchen rather than focusing on the move itself.

Once he was done with his quick 'grocery shopping' at his own

kitchen, Bakugou went back to Todoroki's apartment. He was fully aware that cooking in his kitchen would have been much more convenient and easier, but the rice was upstairs at Todoroki's place, so really, he had no other choice. It was simply yet another sacrifice that he would have to make for the sake of their mission - or so Bakugou was telling himself, at the very least.

"It's summer, so I should take that into consideration as I prepare our lunch…" Bakugou muttered to his own buttons as he settled his groceries down on the kitchen counter and pondered over what to cook. The easiest choice would be to prepare a regular Japanese breakfast, and piggyback from that to create a bento-style lunch for them. No heating would be required, and they also wouldn't need to set up the table before eating. So long as he avoided anything that could easily spoil due to the humid heat, he'd be good to go. "No, actually, I can just make whatever. Todoroki can create some ice to keep the food safe and sound, if it comes down to it."

Mind made up, Bakugou immediately got down to business.

Nothing screamed 'Japanese breakfast' louder than miso soup, and that was exactly what he started with. He decided on a cold miso soup using some of the vegetables and tofu he had in his fridge, making something light that would not only pair up very well with the rice but also keep their bodies refreshed. To accompany, he cooked three pieces of salted salmon, one for each of them and a smaller extra one to mince into flakes and use as filling for rice balls. Bakugou also quickly prepared a bean sprout salad and spinach with sesame miso sauce during his downtime as side dishes for their lunch.

Swiftly and with barely any wasted time, Bakugou cooked up a storm akin to that of a professional chef. Not even Todoroki's lacking kitchen got in his way - he simply adapted and overcame the limitations imposed on him by his workspace.

He was about to get started on the tamagoyaki, half of which was

meant to be saved for their lunch, when he was greeted with the first truly challenging roadblock to his cooking: a ringing doorbell.

At first, Bakugou halted and looked over in the direction of the door, but he promptly resumed what he was doing. He figured it was just a random journalist or paparazzi testing whether the 'couple of the week' was up for some exclusive interviews at long last or not, and, as such, it could be ignored.

However, the doorbell rang once again, this time accompanied by some knocking directly on the door. That meant their visitor wasn't one of those annoyances keeping guard outside of the apartment complex, but instead someone already inside the building. Bakugou wasn't one to enjoy playing the host in his own home, let alone at someone else's, but with Todoroki still sleeping, he had no choice but to pause his cooking and go all the way to the entrance to check who the hell was bothering them so early in the morning.

Bakugou very much regretted having done so the moment he opened the front door.

"Shoooou- Wait, what the heck are you doing here?" said Enji, the pitch of his voice dropping to something more serious and menacing when the person who opened the door didn't end up being who he was expecting.

"I should be the one asking you that," sighed Bakugou, somehow suppressing his urge to roll his eyes. "Why the hell are you dropping by unannounced so damn early in the freaking morning? Don't you have anything better to do with your time?"

"I'm not here for you, so I see no reason why I need to be answering your uncalled-for questions," scoffed Enji, meeting the youngster's passive-aggressive words with the coolness of a seasoned adult.

“Where’s Shouto?”

“Still sleeping. Come back at a later time to ruin his day,” retorted Bakugou, already in the process of closing the door. Obviously, if Enji had been a reasonable person who would have left peacefully and come back at a different time, they wouldn’t have needed to make their deal in the first place. The retired pro hero grabbed the side of the door with his prosthetic hand and made it impossible for Bakugou to close the door.

“I can wait for him to wake up, thank you very much,” declared Enji, shamelessly pushing the door wide open and taking a step inside the apartment.

“If that’s how you want to go about it, be my guest. Just don’t complain for whatever might happen,” grumbled Bakugou, his furrowed brows twitching with repressed anger. He was far too busy with the cooking to deal with that walking headache, so he was going to take a step back and let Todoroki deal with his own family once he got up. Bakugou could already foresee the gigantic argument that would implode the moment father and son met, and he wanted to have nothing to do with it.

He stomped back inside, closely followed by a silent Enji. The living room and kitchen area were already very cramped due to the piles of boxes and deconstructed furniture, but they felt even smaller now that a tall, bulky man was taking up even more space.

I’m just gonna ignore him and finish what I’m currently doing, Bakugou told himself in the back of his mind, promptly following through with his words and returning to the kitchen. The tamagoyaki wouldn’t get done by itself, and Bakugou also didn’t want to lose his cooking momentum.

He cracked a handful of eggs into a bowl, mixed and added the seasoning, and then whisked them until well combined. To make the process run more smoothly, Bakugou had left the frying pan heating on a low setting on the stove while he had gone to answer the door. Thanks to that, the frying pan was ready to go the moment the egg mixture was whisked.

The sizzling sound of the bright yellow eggs hitting the lightly oiled frying pan momentarily broke the tense silence inside the apartment. Bakugou reduced the stove setting a bit more, and patiently let the thin layer of egg cook before he expertly rolled it with the help of chopsticks. He then added some more egg to the pan and repeated the same process again and again, steadily increasing the roundish size of the rolled omelette until there was no more egg mixture.

“Hmph, as expected of a so-called ‘genius’,” grumbled Enji under his breath, though still loud enough to be heard by said genius. Seeing as Bakugou was the only person up and about, it went without saying that he had been the one cooking the food neatly plated on top of the kitchen counter. Enji had closely observed every single dish and then the way Bakugou was cooking the tamagoyaki, intending to criticise every single mistake and imperfection. However, the entire meal spread was annoyingly flawless. Enji hated to admit it, but it probably also tasted as good as it looked. “But don’t think such a basic level of cooking makes you a suitable spouse for my son! There are plenty of people who can do this much, and plenty more who can do even better!”

“Hah! If anything, that makes your son not a suitable spouse for *me*,” snorted Bakugou, not falling for the kindergarten-level goading and nitpicking. “He can barely cook rice in a rice cooker, let alone make a full meal unsupervised. Ain’t he quite the catch?”

“Tsk…” Unable to come up with a good comeback against that, Enji clicked his tongue in annoyance. How dare he bring up his son’s lack of culinary skills when getting him married to the right bride was precisely meant to sort out that and many other issues? “If you cannot recognise how great a catch my son is, then you truly don’t deserve to

be married to him. Get your marriage annulled ASAP and then go look for someone else who has the same cooking level as you. Worry not, I have a long list of skilled young ladies who would love to feed Shouto every single day for the rest of his life. You can let go of that role you stole with a clear conscience."

"That 'rest of his life' would be real short, since he only wants to eat *my* food," Bakugou pointed out, a knowing smirk tugging at the corner of his lips. "Don't old folks usually say that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach? I've had your son's stomach wrapped around my little finger for literal years now. Good luck finding someone who can undo all of that."

"Be careful of what you say, because I might just do exactly that!" scoffed Enji, getting even more stoked about finding the perfect partner for his son and kicking this smug usurper off his high horse. "Besides, food isn't the be-all and end-all of a good marriage. There are all sorts of requirements, and you definitely do not meet even half of them!"

"That's not what your son says, but sure, whatever makes you sleep better at night," snorted Bakugou, his mischievous smirk widening even further, so that he could stab that statement deeper still into Enji.

"What Shouto says or doesn't say is besides the point!" declared Enji, his hands clenching into fists as he stomped into the kitchen. "I know very well this whole marriage is a sham meant to annoy me! No matter how many times you try to deny it or how many people you rope into your little lie, I will not be deceived by your crappy acting skills! It's so obvious you two are going out of your way to put on a show. It's frankly laughable, actually! But don't think for even a second that just because those idiots calling themselves journalists fall for your crass fabrications that I will… also……"

"Hey, who gave you permission to touch me?" snarled Bakugou, his smirk instantly turning into a frowning glare when he felt Enji's finger

slide across his neck. “Wanna lose that hand too, is that it?”

“Huh…?” Enji was so taken aback that Bakugou’s vicious threat didn’t even reach his ears. He was expecting to smudge the makeup on the young pro hero’s neck with his finger, but nothing of the sort ended up happening. He wasn’t all that familiar with special effects and makeup products, but he concluded that Bakugou must have been using something capable of withstanding daily ‘wear and tear’. He grabbed onto the front of Bakugou’s t-shirt with his prosthetic hand and then started strongly rubbing and scrubbing his neck with his other hand, far too focused on proving his point to hear the young man’s hissing complaints. However, no matter how hard he tried to wipe them, those markings refused to disappear. “Hmm…???”

“Are you out of your mind!? Do you want me to kill you!?” barked Bakugou, his glaring eyes tightening even further as he grabbed Enji’s wrist and put a stop to all of that rubbing. “Don’t think I won’t freakin’ hit you just because you were once my boss or are currently my father-in-law! I’m not into manhandling cripples, but I will if you don’t let go right fucking NOW!”

“No, it can’t be…” Enji muttered under his breath, his turquoise eyes wide with shock. Since he couldn’t wipe the marks, that had to mean they were real. With them being located in such an area, it went without saying that Bakugou couldn’t have done them to himself; someone else had to, and since his son was the only other person who had been with him since those photos came out… Enji’s brain churned and twisted itself into knots trying to come up with a different explanation - one that didn’t confirm what his son had told him during the previous day’s phone call.

He might not have been the best or the most present father, but he knew his kids very well, including his youngest son’s distaste for lies and his inability to play-pretend to even save his own life. Shouto also wasn’t one to get involved with others just because, and he gave preference to meaningful relationships above anything else. Taking all of that into consideration, if his son was truly sexually involved with the man he married out of the blue, then Enji would automatically

lose the foundation he was using to accuse their marriage of being a sham…

No! Just a few hickeys and such on someone's neck doesn't mean anything! Anyone could do that in such a visible area to lead others into thinking they have been having sex! Enji screamed in the back of his mind, still refusing to trust the reality that his own two eyes were observing. He could bet his entire fortune that if he looked somewhere else that was covered by clothes, he wouldn't find a single mark on Bakugou's body. Thinking he had won this round, a knowing smirk appeared on Enji's lips. "Heh, this time for sure, I will unmask your shitty lies!"

Without any warning aside from his cryptic words, Enji yanked his prosthetic arm upwards and, with that swift movement, pulled up Bakugou's t-shirt. The result was akin to someone removing the cloth covering up the most exquisite of paintings during its inauguration: Bakugou's ripped torso was meticulously embellished with a ridiculous number of hickeys in the most diverse phases of fading. Half of his chest was still covered by his t-shirt, but what could be seen of it told anyone who saw it that it was the most 'loved' area of them all.

"…!? …!! …!?!?" Bakugou was so scandalised by what had just happened that he was rendered speechless for a good handful of seconds, his mouth opening and closing like a fish out of water without any sounds coming out.

But he actually didn't need to say anything himself, as a third voice was more than eager to speak for both of them.

"What do you think you're doing to my spouse?" asked Todoroki, his voice icy cold and face frozen in an uncharacteristic angry frown. He had been woken up by the sound of his father's voice, which was already enough to put him in a bad mood, but to think he'd be walking out of his bedroom only to see Enji assaulting Bakugou… The air around him rippled from the sudden temperature rise, as Todoroki

was that one person who took ‘fuming mad’ to a whole alarmingly literal level.

“Ah… W-Wait, that’s not it…!” stammered Enji, immediately yanking both of his hands away from Bakugou. He was forced to take a couple of steps away from him when his son started walking towards them, his heterochromatic eyes simultaneously fiery hot and deadly cold.

“Are you okay, Bakugou?” As soon as Todoroki stepped into the kitchen, he protectively wrapped his arms around Bakugou and guided him further away from his father. He adjusted his t-shirt into a more proper appearance while making sure there weren’t any injuries on him. “Why didn’t you wake me up and tell me he was here?”

“As if I need any backup when dealing with him,” scoffed Bakugou, jerking his chin to point at the ‘him’. “Also, can you turn down the temperature? It’s already hot as it is, I don’t need you making it even worse.”

“What are you doing here?” asked Todoroki, redirecting his questions to his father now that he knew his ‘husband’ was more than okay. He also did as told and cooled down a bit. The last thing Todoroki wanted was to accidentally burn Bakugou with his Quirk, after all.

“I’ve come to discuss with you your annulment,” said Enji after clearing his throat and straightening his body. “According to my research, you can still get your marriage annulled, since it hasn’t even been a week since you went to the courthouse. The sooner you two end this farce, the less damage your reputations will take.”

“I already told you I’m not getting separated from Bakugou,” declared Todoroki, his arms holding onto his ‘husband’ more closely, like he was anticipating his father attempting to physically pull them apart. “Have you found anyone who matches all of the requirements I told

you about? Obviously, you haven't. So go away and stop disrupting our day. We're moving to our new apartment today, and the last thing we need is you getting in the way."

"Heh, that's exactly what I've come to talk about," announced Enji, a victorious smirk already present on his scarred face. "After going through every single file in my possession, I've narrowed down the prospect 'ideal brides' to just five candidates. That means you are free to throw away that subpar spouse you currently have and replace him with someone who will actually improve your life, Shouto."

"I don't need to read those files to know they aren't compatible with me," deadpanned Todoroki, inwardly cursing at how fast and competent his father was whenever running on 'I know what's best for you, so obey me' fumes. "Plus, just like I just told you, we're busy today. I don't have time to discuss these matters with you."

"I beg to differ," retorted Enji, refusing to relent on this topic. "This is something you should discuss *before* following through with the mistake of moving in with him. You're still in time to correct or even avoid making the biggest mistake of your life. Once you're living with him, it will be much harder and more troublesome to separate your intertwined lives and belongings."

"Yeah, that's exactly the point," shamelessly admitted Todoroki, also refusing to let his father force his controlling plans on both himself and Bakugou.

"How about you guys get out of the kitchen and let me finish cooking? Go have your little family time somewhere else out of my way," grumbled Bakugou, his arms hanging down limply next to his body as he was used as some sort of security blanket by Todoroki. At least he wasn't squeezing him too tight, but he'd rather go back to his meal prepping than be made to stand there doing nothing.

“Oh, sorry,” apologised Todoroki, readily letting go of Bakugou. He had been so focused on keeping him safe and sound from his father’s grubby hands that he hadn’t even noticed all of the food on the kitchen counter. He could tell some of it was supposed to be their breakfast, the way it was being served in either plates or bowls rather than in a container or bento box. That meant Todoroki now had yet another reason why he should deal with and kick out his father as soon as possible.

Enji grumbled a bit under his breath at first, but he also did as told and stomped out of the kitchen and into the living room area, always closely followed by Todoroki and his glaring heterochromatic eyes. He absolutely hated that he was following that impudent youngster’s instructions, but Enji would rather keep this discussion just between family members (even though, technically speaking, that ‘impudent youngster’ was now also part of his family). It would be like pulling teeth knowing his son, but he would get him to sit down with him on the sofa and have the long, intricate discussion that should have happened right from the start.

“We had sex there last night,” Todoroki calmly stated the moment he saw his father lowering his body to take a seat on the sofa. His direct, shameless words made Enji jump back up like someone had just lit his behind on fire, his face beyond appalled by what he had just heard. Todoroki’s words also got a plastic container flying straight at him, which hit him on the side of his head. “Ouch…!”

“Next time, I will use a glass container…!” hissed Bakugou, the demonic frown on his face partially hiding the blush creeping up into his cheekbones. He had been about to cut the tamagoyaki into slices, but he changed his mind and placed the kitchen knife down. His annoyed glare remained on his unrepentant ‘husband’ as he walked out of the kitchen and stomped straight into the bedroom, where he remained for just a little bit before coming out once again.

“Ah…!” gasped Todoroki, the moody demeanour on his face immediately startling into agitation and distress once he saw what Bakugou was holding in his hands.

“Is this what you want?” asked Bakugou with a very serious tone, his foot pressing down on the pedal to open the trash can while his hand - or better yet, the condoms and bottle of lube he was holding - hovered right above it. Todoroki vehemently shook his head, far too scared to open his mouth and risk losing those precious items. Pleased with that response, Bakugou removed his foot from the pedal and let the lid fall back down. “Then stop sharing private information with other people! This is your last warning. One more strike and you’re out!”

Todoroki only let out the breath he had been unconsciously holding when he saw Bakugou return to the bedroom and presumably store those two key items back where they belonged. Somehow, he had just barely avoided the nightmarish future he feared the most.

“Hmph, not even a week in and you’re already having spats?” snorted Enji, pushing aside his flabbergasted shock so he could make use of this convenient argument between the recently married duo. “You might as well call it quits now, because you aren’t going to last very long.”

“You don’t even live in the same house as your wife. You’re the last person I want to hear criticising other married couples,” Bakugou snapped back as he returned to the kitchen, despite wanting to have nothing to do with the ongoing family squabble. There was simply something about what Enji had said that had rubbed him the wrong way, to the point he couldn’t help but talk back at him unprompted.

“Uhh…” Likewise, Bakugou’s words had also been fairly damaging to Enji, mainly because they had gone after a particularly sore spot in his marriage with his wife. It went without saying that Bakugou immediately clocked onto that.

“Ohh, now I see. No wonder you’ve been acting so bitter and antagonistic lately,” said Bakugou, his lips slowly stretching into a

knowing smirk. “You’re jealous your son has a better marriage than you do, aren’t you? The way you were trying to check my body, I’d even go as far as to say you’re jealous your precious little heir has been getting more action in the bedroom than you’ve had in the past decade. Oh man, now I feel bad. We weren’t trying to flaunt how much we’ve been enjoying our honeymoon. We’ll try to tone it down while you’re around. My bad.”

“Wha- You- That’s not-” sputtered Enji, far too dumbfounded and embarrassed by the bold (and ever so slightly truthful) accusations that were being thrown straight at him. Clenched fists trembling on the sides of his body, Enji turned his barely bottled up anger at his son. “Are you just going to stand there and let him talk to your father like this!?”

“Bakugou is now my immediate family. Of course I’m going to side with him whenever you’re being unreasonable,” deadpanned Todoroki, inwardly patting himself on the back as he was reminded all over again that he had picked the perfect partner for this mission. Bakugou was truly the only human being on this entire planet who would have the balls to use the Todoroki family’s messy background as an anti-Enji weapon. “If you’re still having issues with your marriage with Mom, you should go talk things through with her, instead of taking it out on us. You look so pitiful now that I don’t even have the heart in me to proceed with my lovey-dovey breakfast time with Bakugou while you’re around.”

That final retort spelt another KO, with Todoroki and Bakugou as the winners and Enji as the sore loser.

It also got Bakugou to burst laughing out loud, as he knew Todoroki had meant what he said and wasn’t being spiteful with his ridiculously direct pieces of advice. Todoroki, though, was completely clueless as to what had made his ‘husband’ laugh so hard.

All he knew was that he must have done something really well, if he

was being rewarded with such an endearing outcome and with one more moment for his prized collection.

Chapter 36

“You were right about it,” said Todoroki after taking a nice, long sip from his bowl of miso soup. “It’s much better when you do the whole thing.”

“Told you so,” sighed Bakugou, casually breaking his salmon into bite-sized pieces and removing any fishbones with his chopsticks. They weren’t even eating the true version of yesterday’s botched dinner, but it was nice to see that Todoroki was already admitting he had been wrong about his previous statements.

“You tend to prefer Japanese-style breakfasts, don’t you?” asked Todoroki as he put down the bowl and picked up his chopsticks anew. Even though it was such a simple dish, the sliced tamagoyaki had come out so soft and ever so slightly sweet. It was a bit different from how his family cooked it, but delicious nonetheless. Bakugou was certainly very talented with his cooking, as it paired perfectly with the cold miso soup, a dish he didn’t even know existed until today.

“It keeps me full for way longer, and I can add leftovers from dinner or random side dishes to it. What’s there not to like?” pointed out Bakugou with a quick shrug, finally beginning his breakfast now that the salted salmon was ready to be eaten without any extra work. “You didn’t really think I’d be satisfied with just your crappy, unseasoned fried eggs, right?”

“Yeah, that was my bad,” admitted Todoroki, now fully aware of how bad he had fumbled the previous day’s breakfast, even if done with the best intentions in mind. “Well, I also tend to prefer Japanese food, so I’m okay with that. I look forward to eating your miso soup every single day.”

“Hey,” called Enji, his voice nothing more than an annoyed grumble.

His frowning face matched his tone perfectly as he watched the homely breakfast scene unfolding from the opposite side of the living room. “Are you seriously going to continue putting on a show even while you’re eating? I already told you I know you’re not an actual couple. Stop faking it already!”

“We’re just talking like normal, though?” said Todoroki, his head slightly tilted as he popped a piece of salted salmon into his mouth.

“If you’re that bothered by our great relationship, the door’s that way,” added Bakugou, pointing with his chopsticks to the short corridor that led to the front door of Todoroki’s apartment.

“I might have withdrawn the last few times, but today I’m completely free. I have all the time in the world to catch you two in the act of faking this whole thing,” declared Enji, his turquoise eyes narrowing as he made his stance crystal clear.

He had initially come with the intention of dragging them all the way to the courthouse and forcing them into annulling that sham of a marriage. However, it quickly dawned on him that such a plan would be the wrong move - not because he feared that Bakugou would be kicking and screaming all the way there, but because he knew he would weaponise his tense marriage with Rei against him once again.

Plus, his son would definitely not take it lightly if he ‘kidnapped’ his so-called ‘spouse’ and baited him into going to the courthouse of his own volition. The reaction he had when Enji was… *investigating* the validity of what was being said in all sorts of news outlets was quite indicative of what his son would do if he went a bit too far. So Enji needed a different strategy for what he could already guess to be a full-blown attrition war.

“Great, this couldn’t be happening on a better day…” groaned

Bakugou in utter exasperation, his eyes nearly rolling all the way to the back. Their single-day moving schedule was already packed and hectic enough as it was; now they also had to deal with one of their main ‘enemies’ while managing all of that. He switched his begrudging glare from the pigheaded old man to his ‘husband’. “He’s your father. You babysit him.”

“I’d rather get rid of him,” deadpanned Todoroki without a single drop of hesitation. That got them another angry ‘Hey!’ barked at them, but they mutually decided to ignore it and continue with their conversation over breakfast. “I don’t care about his investigation, or whatever it is he’s trying to do. But I’m pretty sure he wouldn’t think twice about sabotaging our day. I don’t want to cancel or reschedule our date tomorrow.”

“And you just guaranteed he’ll be spending the whole day sabotaging our move with that one…” sighed Bakugou, tiredly dropping against the sofa’s backrest. He didn’t need to look at Enji to know he was victoriously smirking from ear to ear at that piece of information. “This is why I keep telling you to shut your mouth…”

“Ah,” gasped Todoroki, only now realising what he had done. He immediately turned his head towards his father, who quickly wiped that smug expression from his face and replaced it with the same frown as before. Todoroki wasn’t all that good when it came to reading other people, but he could almost see the gears turning inside Enji’s brain as he tried to come up with multiple ways to halt their progress throughout the day. “You really are a terrible person.”

“Uh… I, err, I’m doing this for your and your future’s sake,” grumbled Enji a bit awkwardly, slightly hurt about his son’s mean accusation. However, he had already made up his mind about seeing this through until the end, even if it meant he would be the bad guy of this arc in Shouto’s life. “You might hate it right now, but you’ll thank me later on.”

“I highly doubt that,” denied Todoroki, inwardly letting out one more tired sigh. Since words alone didn’t seem enough to deal with this huge roadblock in their plans, he might have to bring out the big guns. He grabbed his smartphone from the pile of boxes they were once again using as a temporary dining table and started dialling a certain phone number. Not even a handful of seconds later, he was hearing the phone call receiver’s voice. “...Yes, good morning, Mom.”

“Urgh…!” Upon hearing the word ‘Mom’, Enji knew right away who was on the other end of that phone call. His tall body flinched from head to toes, as if he were a little kid who had just been caught red-handed doing something he should not have. He anxiously looked around, seeking somewhere he could take refuge until that phone call was over, but his son read him like an open book and marched towards him with an eerily blank demeanour.

“Yes, we’re moving to our new apartment today,” said Todoroki as he walked up to his father, grabbing him by the scuff of his shirt before he could go hide in his bedroom or in the bathroom. “Yes, Bakugou hired a moving company to do the transportation of our stuff, so I don’t think we’ll need any additional help. Bakugou has also prepared some food for us to eat for lunch. We’ll be fine in that regard until his kitchen is up and running.”

“H-Hey, Shouto…!” Enji called in a whisper, pleading for his release with his panicky eyes. This time for sure, his son made a show out of pretending he hadn’t heard him.

“We do have a little problem here, though,” continued Todoroki, calmly explaining to his mother the big thorn in his side while making direct eye contact with his father. “Dad decided to pay us a visit during his day off and has declared he will do everything in his power to get in our way and cancel the date we have planned for tomorrow.”

“I-I did not say that! …At least not out loud…” yelped Enji in his own defence, a shocked expression on his face at seeing his son so easily

telling on him to his mother. Sure, he had raised Shouto to be an upstanding member of society and he admittedly wasn't being all that nice, but in cases like this one, matters should stay within the involved individuals only - snitching was absolutely a no-go! Enji really, truly, wholeheartedly hated what he was about to do, but he was currently stuck between a rock and a hard place. He literally had no choice but to glance at Bakugou, seeking any type of help from him… even though he knew he did not deserve it…

"I told you not to complain for whatever might happen," said Bakugou, leisurely sipping on his cold miso soup as he watched this hilarious show unfold right before his eyes. For all of the faults that could be found within the Todoroki family, at least they were entertaining to have around.

"You bastard…!" hissed Enji as he was dragged away by his son to the bedroom, probably to keep him and Bakugou separated. Nevertheless, he accusingly pointed at that menace in human shape while continuing to bluster at him. "You did this, didn't you!? You also told Shouto to weaponise Rei against me!"

"Yeah, I'm an excellent strategist. Learned from the best," Bakugou calmly remarked, his lips curling into a knowing smirk as he followed Enji's temporary exit with his gaze. He lifted one of his hands and waved goodbye at him as an additional taunt. "You've known me for long enough to understand that I never go down without one nasty fight first. Using someone's weakness against them is a no-brainer. So, really, you only have yourself to blame for this one."

"Curse you, Dynamight…!" howled Enji as he disappeared inside his son's bedroom, the door slamming shut soon after.

"Heh, what a chump," snorted Bakugou under his breath, proceeding with his breakfast like he hadn't just gotten a grown-up on time-out to get admonished by his own wife. He knew it was just a stopgap strategy, though. There was no doubt that after this, Enji would

become a much harder opponent to deal with, if only so he could get back at Bakugou in kind. But that was something that future him would overcome when the time arrived. For now, he could congratulate himself on a job well done. *And I guess I should also congratulate that idiot for actually following through with this emergency tactic so smoothly. I have no idea what did it, but Endeavor sure must have pissed off his oh so precious son.*

Just as Bakugou was wondering about what had made Todoroki jump straight to calling for his mother's backup, just like they had discussed last night in their end-of-day briefing, the man in question emerged from the bedroom, closing the door anew behind himself.

"That should keep him entertained for a while," said Todoroki, gesturing with his thumb at his bedroom as he walked back to the sofa and took a seat in the same spot as before. "Mom was a bit confused at first, but I think she got the gist of it by the time I passed the phone to him."

"It worked, but using your mother from the get-go instead of saving her for later could very well have been a double-edged sword," pointed out Bakugou after he finished chewing the rice he had in his mouth. "He's going to be twice as determined to bust us once he's back."

"Maybe on a different day this might work against us, but for today, I think he will stay well-behaved until he goes back home," stated Todoroki very peacefully, which gave some additional plausibility to his claims. "He might look like that, but he's weirdly weak against Mom. He will never do anything that might make her hate him ever again. So don't worry, our date is safe and sound now."

"I was not worried about the date," scoffed Bakugou, promptly turning his face away. The only thing he had ever considered was their move and the schedule he had created. He wanted to leave perfectly clear that the date wasn't even a definite thing yet, but he

couldn't mention that without also voicing out loud their whole fake marriage plan, so Bakugou left it at just that for now. To signal that this conversation was over, he shovelled some more rice into his mouth, eating nearly half of the bowl in a single sitting.

I was kinda worried about it, though, Todoroki admitted in the back of his mind. Their tentative date was such a rare opportunity. He wholeheartedly did not want to do anything that might put it at risk, especially if said risk was coming from his side of their current issues.

Just like Bakugou had pointed out, this small, peaceful break was very much temporary. The conversation between his parents would eventually end, and Enji would come out of his bedroom. Once that happened, his father would become a tamer obstacle, but still an obstacle nevertheless. Todoroki needed to come up with a more permanent solution, if only to keep his father at bay for a little bit, hopefully until the end of their vacation.

Besides, now that Enji knew they would probably go out on a date tomorrow, there was no telling if he wouldn't come by uninvited once again and try to become the third wheel that tended to ruin an encounter between two lovers. Just because their romantic relationship was being faked didn't mean that Todoroki didn't want to do a good job at romancing his 'spouse'. If they were going on a date, even if under fake pretences, he wanted to make the most out of every single second.

I wonder what I can do to make sure our date doesn't follow the usual trend of getting interrupted left and right at the most inconvenient moments…, pondered Todoroki, his head slightly tilted as he munched on some salted salmon. He had never gone out on a date before, so he wasn't entirely sure what to expect out of it, let alone how it was usually planned. *If we want to avoid running into someone who knows us… we'd have to go abroad, so that's out of the question. Avoiding people whom we know is more realistic, but still complicated to pull off in this city. But I also wouldn't know where to go outside of our city… Hmm… Dates are hard…*

Usually, his first instinct would be to ask someone with some dating experience. But that narrowed it down to just Midoriya and his older brother Natsuo… which actually meant just Natsuo, as asking for Midoriya's advice in a matter related to Bakugou could have very deadly repercussions. Plus, Todoroki had already learned his lesson about sharing private information with other people, having been reminded about his past mistakes thanks to a plastic container thrown to his noggin.

This side quest was entirely in Todoroki's hands. He was the one who suggested it, so it was only fair he took the lead. All he had to do was come up with a good plan that both pleased Bakugou and furthered their mission.

"Alright, I'm gonna do it," declared Todoroki out loud, nodding his head decisively along with his strong-willed words.

"Great, the dishes are all yours then," said Bakugou, pushing his neatly piled empty plates closer to Todoroki. With that out of his way, he started getting ready to leave. They had changed into their clothes before they initiated their breakfast, so that preparation was basically just grabbing his smartphone and a small paper bag with other miscellaneous stuff he had brought over throughout the two days he spent at Todoroki's apartment.

"Eh? Ah… You're leaving already?" asked Todoroki, his eyes darting to Bakugou's empty plates, then back to his 'spouse'. Had he been lost in thought for so long that Bakugou had finished eating meanwhile? He for sure had not noticed that.

"I gotta go get my stuff ready to go," pointed out Bakugou, already walking to the entrance area. That got Todoroki to jump out of the sofa and follow after him, probably to walk him outside. "Just keep proceeding like we planned, even with your father around. I'll let you

know once the moving company arrives."

"Alright…" sighed Todoroki, a bit disappointed about that, but Bakugou did have a good reason why they needed to part ways for the time being. "I'm not entirely sure of what will come out of Mom admonishing Dad, but if it gets him to leave, great. If it doesn't… I'll just think of something."

"So long as that 'something' does not involve any type of private information disclosure… break a leg. Or break his leg, I don't care," grumbled Bakugou, very cautiously observing his 'husband' and his current facial expression. He couldn't be 100% sure, given how dense and moronic he could be at times, but it seemed like Todoroki had gotten the message loud and clear. Still, just to play safe… "By the way, when I say, 'break a leg', I mean that in the figurative sense, okay? Do not break a leg for real! You can only break his legs, not yours!"

"I know that," deadpanned Todoroki, providing his 'partner-in-crime' with an expressionless thumbs-up. "A broken leg would get in the way of our date."

"Date this, date that… Is that the only thing you can think of right now?" groaned Bakugou while rolling his eyes in exasperation.

"No, I've actually been thinking about something else too," said Todoroki, this time taking Bakugou's question a bit too literally. He opened the front door for Bakugou, but rather than let him slip outside, we caught him with his arms right under the doorframe. Todoroki made his move before his 'husband' could start hissing at him like a threatening cat and gave a light peck to his lips. "I have to start working on the usual daily quota. Also, I haven't gotten a chance to mention it until now, but I'm glad you're already able to walk on your own."

“I told you you were underestimating my stamina and durability…” mumbled Bakugou, his face slowly creasing into a pouty frown. “That was nothing that a good night of sleep couldn’t fix…”

“So it seems,” acknowledged Todoroki with a small nod. “Now that my job has been concluded without any issues, I’m looking forward to the reward you mentioned last night.”

“You already got it, though,” scoffed Bakugou, not falling for Todoroki’s expectant puppy-dog eyes. “Or to be more precise, you got half of it already. The rest is being saved for later.”

“…?” Todoroki was so confused by what that meant that he simply tilted his head quizzically in total silence. He didn’t remember having gotten anything from Bakugou. If he had, he would certainly not miss it.

“Our food deal technically hasn’t started yet, has it?” pointed out Bakugou, his crimson eyes twinkling with a mischievous glint even though the rest of his face remained the same. “So there you have it. A breakfast and lunch that were not part of the deal, since they were not cooked in my brand new kitchen.”

“I knew that reward story was too good to be true…” grumbled Todoroki, blankly staring at the man who had, yet again, tricked him completely.

“What, you didn’t like the food I made?” asked Bakugou, his gaze tightening suspiciously. His fist was already ready to go in case Todoroki told him that the quality of his cooking was not in line with a reward of such a calibre.

“No, it was delicious,” Todoroki reassured, his face softening back to

his usual expressionless demeanour. “But it’s still annoying that you tricked me yet again, despite telling me that you were not going to…”

“It’s not my fault you created all sorts of expectations all on your own for that promised reward,” pointed out Bakugou with a quick shrug. “Besides, I can’t let Endeavor be the only one getting toyed around with. You gotta get a little taste of that too every now and then or else you might get too ahead of yourself.”

“It’s not the lack of manipulative ploys that gets me too ahead of myself,” deadpanned Todoroki, inwardly sighing at Bakugou’s ‘I will never admit fault’ stance. Maybe if he practised a bit of blunt honesty, it would nudge his ‘husband’ just a little bit and get him to be at least 1% more sincere. Failing wouldn’t affect their status quo all that much, but the possibility of that improvement was worth a shot. Todoroki let go of Bakugou’s waist and instead caged his face between his hands, just in case he tried to pretend not to hear him or to avert his gaze. “I get too ahead of myself because you’re so cute and how much you let me get away with.”

“…Keep complaining, and you won’t get to have either ever again…” begrudgingly grumbled Bakugou, his cheeks suffering a sudden spike in temperature - surely because of the hands grabbing his face; it’s not like he was blushing or anything.

“You couldn’t suppress the cuteness if you tried,” chuckled Todoroki, feeling so very tempted to kiss Bakugou one more time. By the time that thought popped up in his brain, he was already in the middle of doing exactly that. Oh, to have the leeway and time to kiss him a couple more times. But alas, today was a busy day. He let go of Bakugou, this time for real, and finally let him go on his way back to his apartment. “Let me know if you need any help with your things.”

“Screw you too,” scoffed Bakugou, promptly turning around on his heels and stomping towards the stairs. He’d rather get the hell out of there as soon as possible than wait for the elevator and risk getting

swept up by Todoroki's sweet talking.

He let me help him that much yesterday, but now he's back to his usual solo self, Todoroki chuckled to himself again. Perhaps it was this stern independence of his that made the moments where Bakugou showed some weakness so endearing and memorable. Todoroki didn't have a preference for either way. The zigzagging from one to the other was oftentimes chaotic and confusing, but he liked each side for different reasons.

"Are you done with the fake flirting?"

"....." When Todoroki closed the front door and turned back around, lo and behold, Enji was by the entrance to the living room area, arms crossed over his chest and a stony frown on his face. "I keep telling you this is how we usually talk with one another."

"Sure it is," scoffed Enji, his actual disbelief showing on his frowning face. "I see that his evil personality and little evil plans are starting to rub off on you. How could you tattle on me to Rei like that? And at his request, to boot!"

"It wasn't at his request," sighed Todoroki, walking back inside the living room. "We knew you'd bother us during our time off from work, so we came up with a few different ways to stop you from forcibly dragging us all the way to the courthouse."

"Tsk…" So Enji really had been busted right from the start, huh? It was a good thing he switched gears so early during his unannounced visit. Who knew what other malicious schemes the evil genius who was now part of the family had come up with?

"But it's a good thing you've brought that up. Because I think we need

to talk," said Todoroki, his voice dropping a couple of degrees into icy cold territory while going all out with the serious tone. Enji opened his mouth to speak, possibly to defend himself, but Todoroki cut him off right away. "Mom might have admonished you plenty, but I haven't had my turn yet. Letting us be honest with you, regardless of what we might want to say, is part of your redemption, right?"

Enji softly grumbled under his breath in complaint for a couple of seconds, but then closed his mouth, straightened his back and looked straight at his son, his demeanour screaming 'do your worst'. Not even a single hint of fear or discomfort could be found on his face or body language. There was only resignation and acceptance there.

"I know you think our marriage is a sham and I'm doing this out of spite, but if you truly only have my best interests in mind with your insistence on an arranged marriage, I hope you can tone all of this down a little bit," started Todoroki, alluding to all the different times Enji had tried to convince him to get his marriage annulled and the undermining of his relationship with Bakugou. "While Bakugou might have some… mean-spirited reactions and comebacks, neither of us is having all that much fun constantly arguing with you. If my happiness and well-being truly are your priority, you should back off and leave us be."

"It's precisely because I have your best interests in mind that I'm saying that *you* should back off and give up on this silly scam you're trying to pull," sighed Enji, doing his best to approach this subject as calmly as he could. They were both adults, so they should act like it and talk things through without resorting to underhanded schemes. "It might be easy to deceive other people, but I'm your father, Shouto. I'm not as negligent as to not know what is happening in my children's personal lives. No matter how secretive you might try to be, there are always signs when someone is actually dating someone and whatnot. And there has been absolutely none of that from you up until you suddenly announced you had gotten married to Bakugou, out of all people."

"So you're saying the reason you don't believe us is that we were too

good at keeping our relationship a secret?" asked Todoroki, just to clarify what he had understood from his father's words.

"Yes, that's *one* of the many reasons why I don't believe you," acknowledged Enji with a sharp nod of his head.

"So, in other words, all we have to do is give you concrete evidence that this isn't a last-minute ploy to get out of an arranged marriage," concluded Todoroki, connecting the dots fairly fast, much to his own surprise. Or perhaps it was simply a given, as Todoroki himself recognised that publicly dropping such a bomb out of nowhere could arouse suspicion, not just with his side of the deal, but also Bakugou's.

Obviously, he and Bakugou had discussed at length what sort of methods they could use to prove the validity of their surprise relationship reveal. They were mainly making use of his friends and former classmates as their alibi, since they were a good, credible source of information. Every single one of them was aware of their plan and had a 'script' written by Bakugou, so that all of their stories matched seamlessly. However, a cohort of witnesses hadn't been the only strategy they had come up with.

I don't want to deviate too far from what we had agreed on, but I have no choice but to improvise a little bit, if it means Dad will back off for now, sighed Todoroki in the back of his mind. He took a full turn and started walking right back to the entrance. "Come with me for a bit."

"Where?" asked Enji, cautiously suspicious of what his son's current intentions were. They were having a fairly productive conversation, so why the sudden change of plans? Despite his reluctance, he still ended up following him to the entrance, where they put their shoes back on.

Todoroki didn't provide him with any answer. He simply urged him to continue following him to the elevator with a small jerk of his chin.

The silence quickly turned requited, as Enji decided to just wait and see where this would lead them.

Soon enough, they found themselves one floor down from Todoroki's apartment. With the number of doors being the same, Enji quickly concluded that the apartment his son was walking towards was the one right below the unit where he lived. Todoroki rang the doorbell but then immediately knocked on the door a couple of times too - a gesture that came off as something he had done again and again from how smoothly it had been.

"Ah…" gasped Enji, his brain having suddenly come up with a credible explanation for what was happening right now. He did not want to trust his instinct, but before he had a chance to talk himself out of such a theory, the door to the apartment opened.

"...What now?" grumbled Bakugou, a moody frown already plastered on his face. That familiar knocking style had given away who his visitor was, so he didn't even bother with any greeting or nicety as he opened the door.

"This is where Bakugou has lived these past three years," said Todoroki to his father, his calmness contrasting immensely with the dumbfounded expression on the older man's scarred face. "It's also how we've managed to keep our relationship a secret this whole time."

"Hmph. Are you still going to continue insisting this marriage is nothing more than a sham?" scoffed Bakugou, quickly catching on to what was going on. Todoroki and his father had definitely gotten into yet another quarrel over the truth behind their sudden marriage shortly after he had returned to his apartment… "I can go fetch the lease papers if you think this is just one more of our 'elaborate lies'."

No way… Could it be… they really have been dating behind my back this whole time…? The thought of it sounded completely absurd to him, but after being given one more piece of the mystery puzzle, it was getting harder and harder to deny the steadily growing possibility that they were actually telling the truth.

Enji's gut still insisted he was right, but his brain was slowly starting to think that he might have been in the wrong this entire time…

Chapter 37

No, no, no! There must be some sort of trick behind all of this! Enji reminded himself for what felt like the millionth time. He was back inside his son's apartment, standing in his little corner in the living room, thinking good and hard about all of the puzzle pieces he had extracted from the newlywed couple so far.

Yes, Enji was willing to admit that his perception of certain events was faltering here and there, but he still refused to trust the so-called couple's version.

They had indeed gotten officially married to one another, as the courthouse's documents indicated. However, any adult could get married in Japan if they so pleased. For as long as the two counterparts were willing to sign the documents, nothing could stop them. The government obviously didn't require any proof to support their claims of being a couple, and the complaints from those opposed to the marriage did nothing to change the outcome. As such, even if Shouto and Bakugou were not in fact a couple, they could still get married to one another.

That debunked puzzle piece no. 1.

As for their willingness to get all frisky with each other… Well, that certainly put a damper on Enji's plans. For as rocky as his relationship with his children might be, he still knew very well what sort of people they were, including their personalities and moral compasses. Shouto would never - and Enji meant 'absolutely never' here! - act that way with a random person or for the sake of some sort of plan. And Enji was partially to blame for that.

Unfortunately, Shouto was the one who had taken the brunt of Enji's obsession with becoming the no. 1 pro hero in Japan and his

collapsing relationship with Rei, his wife. Fuyumi and Natsuo had been raised mostly separated from Shouto, with very little interaction between all of them save for some key moments and events. They had never seen the worst parts of their dysfunctional family dynamic or the abuse his wife and youngest son had been subjected to. Shouto had seen it all, however, and that had driven him into denying every single aspect that Enji represented, even if it meant denying half of himself.

Of course, that matter was now more than settled, be it with his son, be it with his wife. They had even managed to create a new family dynamic that enabled everyone to have the closeness or distance they were individually most comfortable with. But that didn't mean Enji had magically erased the past, and they were now a picture-perfect family. Some cracks and scars remained - the type that would never fade away, no matter how much time went by and how much Enji tried to atone for it. That was fine by him. He was simply reaping the consequences of his actions. Plus, he wasn't even the one carrying the majority of those cracks and scars; he had been their perpetrator. The rest of his family was the one burdened with the heaviest effects of their past, so it was only fair that he had to struggle and run himself ragged just so he could obtain the privilege to remain in their lives.

Shouto might have allowed Enji to stay in the awkward father-son relationship they had rekindled while he was a student in U.A. High School, but he was aware that plenty had been left unsaid for the sake of maintaining the peaceful status quo. Shouto had stopped denying his father as strongly as he did before, and he also came to accept that half of himself that had come from him - not as a carbon copy of his father, but as something that could be built on and improved according to his own needs.

Perhaps that was why Shouto had always been so adamant about pursuing the arranged marriage family tradition whenever Enji brought up the topic. He didn't want to emulate what his father had done and find himself in a marriage that could very well implode as badly as his parents' had. Enji was very well aware of that possibility, which was why he had already made so many concessions to his son, like not taking Quirk compatibility into consideration and letting

Shouto be the one picking from among all the bride candidates he had found. Obviously, he also did his due diligence and made sure to obtain the permission and consent of every single young lady on the list. All of them were 100% willing to get married into the Todoroki family, specifically to Todoroki Shouto. Not a single one of them had been pressured into it by their families; they had chosen it of their own volition.

That should have eliminated all the concerns Shouto might have had about the arranged marriage. But no, rather than being reassured, he chose to get married to Bakugou behind his back.

With how long the two of them had known each other, there should have been some signs of any sort of relationship to those around them, especially their families, if they truly had been dating this whole time, like they claim. Instead, there was a big nothing that was, without any warning, followed by kisses in public, makeout sessions in staff-only areas and a myriad of shameless marks in both visible and covered-up body parts. They had even admitted to what they had been up to behind closed doors, whether with indirect hissy replies or with shamelessly honest statements.

That had rightfully rattled Enji and his insistence that their marriage was a sham. Shouto was against arranged marriages, so it was a given that he'd also be against frivolous carnal relationships without any feelings involved. While he wasn't close enough to Bakugou to know the ins and outs of his preferences and what sort of relationships he'd be willing to get himself involved in, Enji had the feeling he was somewhat like his son in that regard. Bakugou was, after all, completely uninterested in anything that wasn't related to his job as a pro hero. All in all, Enji was absolutely gobsmacked and so very confused about this sudden, drastic shift.

The second puzzle piece had shaken every single aspect of what he thought to be the truth and added fracture lines all over the foundation he was using to support his stance on the matter.

To make it worse, they had now sprung up on him that Shouto and Bakugou had been neighbours since the moment his son had moved out on his own as the latest puzzle piece. Plus, Shouto had heavily implied that it was this proximity that had allowed them to pursue a romantic relationship in total secrecy.

While it was certainly possible to forge lease agreements, it was basically impossible (and very much illegal) to take over an entire apartment without a real one. Enji might not have searched the whole place like a police officer or a detective would have, but from what he had seen from his quick visit to Bakugou's soon-to-be-former apartment, it was obvious he had been there for a good while. He had definitely not just moved there so they could use it as proof of their fake relationship. The two of them had truly been neighbours this entire time; that much was undeniable.

Enji's stubborn brain had immediately gone into damage control mode and tried to come up with other explanations for what he was witnessing with his own two eyes, even while he was still inside Bakugou's apartment. At one point, he had been gutsy enough to ask them if their living arrangements hadn't been just a convenient coincidence that they were now trying to use in their favour. However, his son's answer had left him completely speechless.

"We used to be upstairs/downstairs neighbours while at the dorm, so we figured we should keep that going until we were ready to move in together. Our work schedules were all over the place when we started working as sidekicks, which wasn't great for maintaining a newly established relationship. But the moment we started to live one floor away from each other again, it became very easy to continue seeing each other daily, no matter how hectic our day was. Plus, it lets us make up for any lost time whenever Bakugou was away in some other area of the country for this or that mission."

That answer had been far too genuine for it to be a lie. And if it was indeed a lie, there was definitely some sincere truth to it underneath the fake.

No matter how much he tried to think about and analyse every single angle of this newly uncovered information, Enji couldn't reach a satisfying conclusion. He was experiencing something similar to the heightened version of forgetting about a word that was right at the tip of his tongue - he could tell that the answer was so very obvious, but the truth still evaded him.

"...I feel like I'm going crazy…" sighed Enji under his breath, his tired voice nothing more than a fading whisper. He focused his absentminded gaze back on Shouto, who had been giving the final touches to his belongings all this while, putting everything that hadn't been packed yet inside their respective boxes. Enji had offered to help him with the packing, but his son had refused instantly, hence why he had been occupying himself with trying to solve this big mystery.

He had come with the intention of dragging both of them to the courthouse to end their sham of a marriage once and for all, but he was yet again forced into a retreat, albeit only figuratively this time around. Enji would have liked it if there was a more direct solution to this family feud, a way to communicate with Shouto without any disagreements or lies. However, there was no such thing. Since he couldn't readily discern whether they were lying straight to his face and deceiving everyone around them or not, a conversation wouldn't solve anything.

If a direct approach doesn't work, I will have to employ other methods to reach the bottom of this matter and convince Shouto to get married to a proper partner, concluded Enji, much to his displeasure. He wouldn't be able to do much today, not after the scolding he had gotten from his wife, but he could still work his way into a better plan. *I'll continue observing them from a distance for the time being, just like I was doing before Shouto began his vacation. Maybe they'll eventually slip up and expose themselves by accident, who knows?*

Bakugou wasn't the only one who was a good strategist, and Enji had the advantage thanks to all of his years of experience working as a

proclaimed pro hero. He had been forced into a standstill due to the current circumstances, which was quite worrisome, as there was a very small time limit to get an annulment. After that, they would have to undergo an actual divorce process, which was far more lengthy and troublesome compared to the annulment. But for this particular 'case', it seemed he truly had no choice but to take his time studying his 'opponents' in hopes of eventually finding the weak spot of their little scheme.

If it's a long, dragged-out battle you want, that's what I'll give you. But don't think for even a minute that I'll go easy on you just because you're my son or have turned Rei into a weapon against me! Enji declared in the back of his mind, his eyes narrowing down as he nearly stared a hole through Shouto. He parted his back from the wall he was leaning on and approached his son, ready to get started with one more interrogatory session. "Shouto."

"...?" Upon being called, Todoroki shifted a quizzical glance at his father midway through closing a box with packing tape.

"When did you fall in love with Bakugou?" asked Enji, going straight to the supposed beginning of their 'love story'. If they were fabricating the whole thing, he was sure he'd be able to find some inconsistencies while interrogating them separately. His son wasn't a good liar and had a knack for blurting out stuff without much thought. He'd be a good starting point and measuring tool for when his inevitable 'match' against the evil genius happened.

"Ah…" Todoroki unconsciously froze at that unexpected question - not because this sudden question had caught him off guard, but because that was such an unusual sentence coming from his father's mouth. He gave that question some thought while he finished sealing the box and placed it on top of a nearby pile. "Right at the start. Probably."

'Probably'? Enji repeated to himself, an eyebrow arching in suspicion. Vague answers were the hallmark of a lazy lie, or so his life

experience had taught him. “How do you know that?”

“I mean… isn’t Bakugou super cute?” pointed out Todoroki, his head slightly tilted as he declared what he thought to be the obvious.

“Cu-!?” interjected Enji, nearly tripping himself in the process. That reply had potentially been the most ridiculous thing he had ever heard in his whole life. “‘Cute’!? Bakugou!? The evil spawn that could very well be Satan incarnate? The guy who goes around town causing explosions left and right and making minced meat out of villains? The one who literally defeated All for One solo as a high school student!? That guy!?”

“Yeah,” simply said Todoroki while nodding his head in confirmation.

“Maybe we have different definitions of ‘cute’ because he can only be classified as the opposite of it as far as I’m concerned!” scoffed Enji, still unable to believe what his ears were hearing. “He might be great at his job, but ‘savage’, ‘menacing’, ‘villainous’ and so on would be better descriptors for him.”

“And yet that still didn’t stop you from assaulting him,” deadpanned Todoroki, his expressionless demeanour once again gaining the same frigid glint from earlier.

“What!? I did no such thing!” declared Enji, so very shocked his own son would accuse him of doing such a heinous thing!

“You were grabbing him and trying to take his clothes off. What else other than assault could that be?” pointed out Todoroki, any remaining expression draining from his face at a very rapid pace.

“Okay, first things first, I was not trying to take his clothes off!” said Enji in his own defence. “I was just checking if those marks on his neck were real or fabricated through makeup! Since they turned out to be real, I was trying to see if they had been placed there on purpose to prove a point, or if they were real *real* and there were others in areas covered by his clothes!”

“Would you have done the same thing if Bakugou were a woman?” asked Todoroki with a sombre tone. His question got his father groaning and visibly cringing, which was, in itself, a good enough answer. “If it’s concrete proof that you want, you could have just asked me. It might not be the same, but my own neck is proof enough as it is. Bakugou is into biting me.”

“I’ve been trying to ignore that this whole time! You shouldn’t have pointed it out like this and ruined that!” yelped Enji, turning his head away as his son gestured with his index finger to the bruised bite marks on his neck. “Also, I don’t need to know what he’s into or not! You can keep that to yourself, too!”

“You were the one who wanted to check it, though,” sighed Todoroki, so very tired of his father’s unreasonable demands and inconsistent questions. He also struggled a bit with Bakugou’s tsundere tendencies, but at the very least, those were a facet of his ‘husband’ that he found endearing. He couldn’t say the same about his father. “Not that I plan on giving you any information about our sex life anymore. I don’t want to be smacked with a glass container.”

“I don’t want to have that sort of information either!” said Enji, his scarred face creasing with a moody frown. “I don’t know if you’re doing it on purpose or not, but you two definitely aren’t keeping it to yourselves all that well since you publicly announced your so-called marriage! You’re causing a ruckus all over social media and news outlets thanks to all of those photos being spread all over the place. What happened to all of that discretion Dynamight is so well-known for, huh?”

“It just happened,” Todoroki replied with a small shrug of his shoulders. They had indeed done it on purpose, but since they had already gotten what they wanted out of it, they planned to dial it down from now on. Obviously, he wasn’t going to say any of that out loud while his father was around. “We might have gone a bit overboard because of our honeymoon, but we’ll be more careful from now on. Bakugou isn’t a big fan of journalists and paparazzi, to begin with. He might have opened an exception these past few days due to these current circumstances, but he’ll definitely go back to his usual discretion soon enough.”

“Hmph!” scoffed Enji with a moody tone, even though he was relieved this subject was being dropped. He also couldn’t allow his ‘interrogatory’ to go downhill so early in the game. Avoiding any landmines that might get his son annoyed with him would benefit him both in the short and long term. He cleared his throat and then added, “There is one other thing I’ve been wondering for a while now. If you two really have been dating this whole time and are married in the true sense of the word, why do you still call each other by your family names? Actually, not even that anymore, since Bakugou isn’t technically a Bakugou anymore, unfortunately…”

“That’s a work in progress,” deadpanned Todoroki, picking up where he had left off with the packing. He had been thinking about that same thing since they signed the papers for their new lease. Given the circumstances, the most logical thing would be to call each other by their first names, right? However, both the force of habit and Todoroki’s inability to tell if Bakugou would even allow such a thing to happen had been getting in the way. He had no clue if or when he should bring it up to his ‘husband’.

“A work in progress, huh…” snorted Enji, the uncertainty in that answer pleasing him and his plans immensely. “As a married man, I can tell you that’s a sign your relationship is far too weak. In other words, you’re not a good match. Like I told you earlier, I’ve narrowed down the list of bride candidates to just a handful of young ladies. If your type is someone cute, I think you’ll be more than happy with any of them.”

“There’s no one cuter than Bakugou, so that’s a no from me,” deadpanned Todoroki, stacking yet another finished box on top of the pile.

“You haven’t even seen them yet. You shouldn’t be jumping to conclusions this fast. Who knows, maybe one of these candidates might turn out to be the love of your life,” pointed out Enji, already grabbing his smartphone from his pocket. It was a good thing he kept a digital copy of every file related to Shouto’s arranged marriage with him.

“I don’t need to see them to know my answer,” sighed Todoroki, turning his body around to better face his father as he sternly talked with him. “Up until this very day, I’ve only ever thought of one person as cute. And that person is Bakugou. No matter how beautiful a woman might be, Bakugou will never stop being number one in my eyes.”

“Grrr…” His son truly was stubborn whenever it came to singing praises about Bakugou, wasn’t he? Because of the unexpressive tone of his voice, one would think that those words were being said out of convenience rather than honesty. However, Enji could tell that Shouto was telling the truth. In fact, it could even be said that Shouto meant every single word he had just spewed out. The certainty and openness were that palpable. “...Does that mean you think Bakugou is better and more beautiful than Rei, your own mother?”

“.....”

“Aha! Caught you now!” revelled Enji, his son’s silence very indicative of what sort of answer he would have to give him. “Of course Rei is better. And I can assure you, there are other women out there who are on the same level as her.”

“No, I was just thinking that’s not a fair question to ask,” retorted Todoroki after another small sigh. “Dating and marrying family members has never crossed my mind. Mom is Mom, no matter what she looks like. And the same can be said about Bakugou. Even if Bakugou didn’t look the way he does, I’d still pick him. It’s not even his appearance that makes him cute, to begin with, even though it does help a bit. He’s just cute. All of him, inside and outside.”

Damn it, he always has an answer ready to go, no matter what sort of questions I ask… Enji grumbled in the back of his mind, getting a bit ticked off by the lack of slip-ups. He could only conclude that they must have created some sort of script ahead of time, in case they were ever questioned by anyone. He was dealing with Bakugou here; that was definitely the most likely scenario. *What sort of question can I ask that might be outside of their little scripted scheme? It has to be something that they haven’t considered but still gives them away…*

Enji was certainly in a very tricky standstill. On one hand, he could think of a couple of questions that would rattle his son a bit and maybe make him crack under pressure. Again, Shouto was not a good liar. Coming up with an excuse out of the blue was not his forte, so to speak. But on the other hand, Bakugou was just too crafty an opponent. He could only imagine what other ‘weapons’ they had in stock to be deployed against Enji if he ever cornered either his son or Bakugou himself.

Then again, every ‘mission’ carried its own dangers and challenges. Enji wasn’t one to give up just because his opponents were a tough nut to crack. He might have to accept that some boundaries will have to be crossed to obtain the results and answers he sought.

Not today, though. He didn’t want to make Rei any angrier at him than she already was…

“Tsk, I guess I’ll have to retreat for now…” grumbled Enji under his breath, feeling extremely frustrated at having to raise the white flag yet again. This interrogatory strategy was not working in the way it had been intended, and any risky manoeuvres could result in severe consequences for him. The juice simply wasn’t worth the squeeze at this point. Retreating and carefully putting together a more concrete plan through the analysis of the information he had gathered so far seemed like the only option that would eventually earn him a victory.

“Hm? Did you say something?” asked Todoroki, turning back around after sort of hearing his father mumbling something.

“I said I’m leaving,” declared Enji, puffing out his chest as he crossed his arms. “But don’t think that means this is over! I have not accepted your marriage to Bakugou! I will do everything in my power to expose your lies AND convince you to follow our family traditions!”

He’s so unreasonably stubborn, sighed Todoroki in the back of his mind, finding silence to be the best retort he could give to his father whenever he was acting out. However, for as much as he’d like to keep that going until Enji was out of his apartment, he did want to make sure of a couple of things. “Does that mean you’re not going to get in the way of our move or tomorrow’s date?”

“Grrr… Rei has left perfectly clear what would happen if I did that, so yes, you are safe for now…” grumbled Enji, his moody frown intensifying even further.

Dad really is weak when it comes to Mom, huh… Todoroki already knew that for a good couple of years now, but it was still a bit surprising how easily Enji folded whenever Rei was concerned. It was no wonder Bakugou had previously labelled her as their strongest anti-Endeavor weapon and one of their biggest allies in this unofficial mission.

“However! Just because I won’t stop you right now, doesn’t mean I won’t interfere in the future!” added Enji, his voice going from resigned to authoritative in the blink of an eye. “You can expect me to be a recurrent guest in your new apartment!”

“Please don’t, I want to be as lovey-dovey as possible with Bakugou,” deadpanned Todoroki, once again so very thankful their new apartment complex had additional levels of security. They could easily bar Enji’s visits if they ever felt like it. “If you’re constantly around, we won’t be able to flirt with a clear conscience. Plus……”

“Plus, what?” asked Enji, an eyebrow slightly arched in a puzzled manner. Whatever it was that his son was thinking about was leaving him extremely reticent about saying it out loud. That got Enji even more interested in and curious about it. “Go on, Shouto. Plus, what?”

“…I’d rather keep his cutest moments to myself only…” mumbled Todoroki after a while, both his gaze and head turning away from Enji. The regular Bakugou was exactly like his father had described him - menacing and moody beyond words. However, whenever they were alone, Bakugou did have some moments where his cuteness level exploded exponentially. Maybe it was selfish of him to think of it like this, but Todoroki really didn’t want to share those moments with other people. He’d rather monopolise them completely for as long as he could, since he was aware that this status quo would end at some point…

“……” Had Enji not been frowning and tensing his facial muscles, his jaw would have probably dropped thanks to this one. This was a side of his son that he had never seen before. Shouto was usually so laidback and altruistic, and yet, here he was, saying some pretty egotistical and spoiled things over another person.

“I need to return to the packing. Are you leaving or staying?” asked Todoroki, moving on from that conversational topic so he could go back to what he was doing.

“I, uh… Yes, I’m leaving,” said Enji after awkwardly clearing his throat. He made sure he had everything on him and then started walking towards the entrance of the apartment, closely accompanied by his son.

Their farewell came out stiff and clumsy, partially due to their ongoing family feud, but Enji’s surprise visit ended peacefully, much to Todoroki’s relief.

…*Or so he thinks!* Enji scoffed in the back of his mind, a knowing smirk on his lips as he stepped inside the elevator and pressed the button to the ground floor. However, as soon as the elevator arrived at its initial destination, Enji let the doors close without disembarking. Then, he pressed the button to the floor below his son’s. *Part one of the interrogatory is over, but I have yet to start part two. Hehehe. Time to catch some inconsistencies red-handed!*

Chapter 38

Once in front of Bakugou's apartment, Enji rang the doorbell and waited. When he heard some light footsteps coming closer, he remembered how his son had gone about it earlier and knocked on the door a couple of times, too. It only took seconds for the door to open.

"……I'll call you back in a bit," sighed Bakugou to the smartphone pressed against his ear. He promptly ended the phone call and returned his gaze to his latest 'guest'. "What is it now? Did your son give you some sort of task so you'd stop annoying him or something?"

"No, I'm on my way back home," said Enji, his eyebrow twitching slightly out of irritation. However, he was not about to let that youngster's aggravation tactics get the best of him, and, as such, he simply ignored that passive-aggressive remark.

"This isn't an airport. You don't need to announce your departure," scoffed Bakugou with a dismissive roll of his eyes.

"Can we speak like actual adults, or will you continue with that bitchy attitude?" sighed Enji, standing his ground in front of the open door. His serious demeanour pretty much screamed that he had no intention of leaving until he had said his piece.

"…Alright. What is it?" conceded Bakugou, as he wanted to make this quick so he could go back to what he was doing.

"I just wanted to ask you a couple of questions," explained Enji, inwardly rehearsing how he wanted to play out the second phase of his initial interrogation. His objective was to ask the same type of questions he had been asking his son and compare their answers, hoping to find any discrepancy that would expose their lies. "When

did you fall in love with Shouto?”

“Huh? What kind of question is even that?” Bakugou retorted, one of his eyebrows slightly arched in puzzlement. That question had been so unexpected that he didn’t even know how he was supposed to react or reply to it.

“I know you supposedly started dating after graduation, but I want to know how it all started before you allegedly got together,” said Enji, trying to be as clear and to-the-point as he could. That would make it harder for Bakugou to find some sort of loophole he could exploit in his favour. “That’s why I want to know when exactly you fell in love.”

“...Fine. But I have a question for you before I give you my answer,” declared Bakugou as he slipped his smartphone back inside his pocket. Since he didn’t get any complaints from Enji, he deemed that to be him giving him his go-ahead. “When did you fall in love with your wife?”

“Ugh…” Enji immediately froze at that question, though not before his vocal cords let out some sort of groan. It only lasted for a few seconds, but to Enji, the silence felt like it had extended for hours on end. Once he had somewhat composed himself, he cleared his throat and answered. “That was such a long time ago. I can’t give you any accurate dates.”

“There you have it, then,” nonchalantly said Bakugou with a quick shrug of his shoulders. “It happened ages ago and during a time period where the whole country was in total chaos. How the hell am I supposed to give you a proper time frame?”

“Tsk…” That had been quite the smart non-answer, that Enji was willing to admit. If he told Bakugou that his answer wasn’t good enough, he would also have to redo his own reply to the same

question. Plus, he did have a point there.

Japan had been a complete mess during the three long years when his son, Bakugou and the rest of their classmates were in high school: their first year was marred with surprise attacks and kidnappings coming from the League of Villains, the second year with a full-blown war against the villain group and their evil mastermind, and the third and final year was spent recovering from the injuries sustained during those gruesome battles and rebuilding the half-destroyed country.

Thoughts about love and romance were definitely the last thing on their minds, hence why Todoroki had allegedly only confessed to Bakugou once they had graduated.

“I thought you were completely uninterested in anything that isn’t related to your job as a pro hero,” scoffed Enji, closely studying Bakugou’s passive expression to be able to determine even the smallest of changes to his demeanour. “I’m surprised you actually accepted to date and marry Shouto.”

“This and that are two completely different things,” pointed Bakugou. “What I do with my private life has nothing to do with my job, and vice versa. Plus, my marital status has no impact on my job. Plenty of pro heroes have spouses and even kids. I have one such case right in front of me.”

“Yes, but you don’t look like the type to do any of that,” remarked Enji, slightly ticked off at once again being used as an example to support Bakugou’s claims.

“Hah! You’re right about that,” snorted Bakugou, a knowing smirk slowly tugging at the corner of his lips. “I definitely wouldn’t be doing any of this stuff with anyone but your son. And it wasn’t because offers coming from others weren’t made, I can assure you of that.”

So, in other words, just like Shouto has only ever thought of Bakugou as cute, Bakugou has also only ever considered getting married to Shouto…, Enji grumbled in the back of his mind. Their answers might have been different, but they still matched perfectly well - both in terms of their collective narrative and individually with their personalities. How vexing. Maybe it was time he diversified his questions to things he had discussed with his son earlier in this whole mess. “Shouto said you kept your relationship a secret from me specifically because you knew I’d be against it.”

“I mean, this conversation we’re having right now is proof enough that we were 100% right about that,” said Bakugou, crossing his arms over his chest and then leaning the side of his shoulder on the door frame. “Being with me meant going against that annoying arranged marriage tradition of yours. He has known that right from the start. And yet, he still picked me. So to save ourselves from the trouble of dealing with your tantrums at a time when we were so busy, we decided to keep it on the downlow until we were ready to take more official steps, so to speak.”

“And you‘re right. I am against it,” declared Enji, confirming what everyone involved already knew. “But don’t misunderstand me here. It’s not you I’m against, per se. I’d have the same reaction and opinion regardless of who Shouto got married to behind my back. You being you or a man or a pro hero is not the issue. The family tradition dictates that the current head of the family picks the spouse for the arranged marriage. That’s about it. Obviously, I also hate the fact that you’re lying and going out of your way to create this whole sham of a marriage.”

“Ugh, you’re so damn stubborn,” groaned Bakugou while rolling his eyes at Enji’s pigheaded, antagonistic position. “I seriously don’t get what your deal is. You literally had no issue with relenting when it comes to your other kids. Heck, one of them even got married behind your back, too, and you didn’t say a single peep about it. So why are you so dead set on seeing your youngest son follow through with those old-fashioned family traditions?”

“What’s the problem with wanting to continue a family tradition?” Enji retorted, using the same technique as Bakugou by replying with a question of his own. “The world is filled with traditions that are followed down to a T. It’s just a part of humanity’s culture, and it’s applied in all sorts of scales. It can be something an entire country follows or just the members of a specific family line. In our case, both my side of the family and Rei’s have a tradition of arranged marriages. I gave up on pursuing this matter with both Fuyumi and Natsuo, yes, but that only happened due to very extenuating circumstances. With Shouto, however, an arranged marriage would significantly improve his quality of life. It has plenty of upsides and nearly no downsides, unlike what would happen with his siblings.”

“Are you sure about that?” asked Bakugou, the frown on his face disappearing as his facial expression turned exponentially more serious. “Because everything that guy has told me so far makes it seem like it would actually negatively impact his life. If it’s what other people want to do, he won’t say anything about it, but he is against being a part of an arranged marriage. Even if you introduce him to countless ‘ideal brides’, the fact that they’d be his partner in an arranged marriage makes them incompatible from the get-go. If you truly want what’s best for him, you should give up on this. Some traditions should stay in the past, rather than being forced on those living in the present.”

“I’m aware of that, which is why I’ve been making so many concessions already,” sighed Enji. He might have a different opinion regarding this matter, but he was willing to, at the very least, listen to what they had to say to come up with a solution that pleased everyone involved. “If I were to follow this family tradition in its true form, I would have personally picked a woman I approve of and left no choice for Shouto aside from marrying her as soon as they were of legal age. Timeline aside, that’s how it went with Rei and me. However, since I know that wouldn’t work with Shouto, I’ve given him full control over which bride candidate he can choose from. I’ve also made sure every single one of those young ladies is willing to participate in an arranged marriage with Shouto, rather than just relying on their families’ own traditions. All in all, I’m keeping the family tradition alive, even if it means making some adjustments to it

so it adheres to modern practices."

"Yeah, that's all good and well, but it doesn't change the fact that he doesn't want to get married to a random person, no matter how much you approve of that chick," Bakugou pointed out after letting out a small sigh. "Besides, why the heck is your list nothing but women? He's married to me, ya know? Did it ever cross your mind that he might not be into women to begin with? Who knows, you might be luckier if you give him a list of men you approve of. I mean, let's be for real here. He still won't say yes to any of them, whether they are a woman or a man, but hey, at least you'd have tried everything."

"I-I didn't think of that…" mumbled Enji with a tamer, more reserved voice. He definitely had never taken into account what sort of person his son was attracted to, both physically and romantically. The majority of the human population was heterosexual, so that's what he based himself on while seeking bride candidates for his youngest son. But now that he thought about it, the fact that he had married Bakugou and was apparently in a sexual relationship with him might be an indication that he perhaps had been picking the wrong gender right from the start. Enji would have to include that new variant once he got back home and brainstormed a new plan. "Shouto is quite popular, so I'm sure I'll be able to find a good young man who fits both his preferences and meets all of my requirements."

"For fuck's sake, you really never learn, do you?" groaned Bakugou in utter exasperation. "I literally just told you he wouldn't pick any of them, whatever they might be. He wants me and no one else. Period. So you have two choices available to you. You either see him happy living the life he chose for himself, or you ruin your relationship with your son permanently by forcing him into a marriage he doesn't want or agree with. You can't have both, no matter how much you try to make it work."

"While I agree with some of your arguments, I still won't support your sham of a marriage," scoffed Enji, going back on the attack now that he had added those tidbits of information to the ones he already had. "No matter how much you try to lie to me, I won't fall for it. I know

you haven't been dating since graduation, and I know you got married just so I wouldn't be able to force Shouto to marry one of the candidate brides. I won't publicly expose any of this, since that would negatively impact Shouto's reputation as a pro hero, but I will do everything in my power to ruin your plans and break your fake marriage apart!"

"Yeah, yeah, good luck with that," dismissed Bakugou with a sarcastic tone, not all that happy to hear how eager Enji was to get in the way of their unofficial mission but still taking that challenge head-on.

"You really shouldn't underestimate me or not take me seriously," warned Enji, his gaze narrowing into thin slits as he stared straight at Bakugou's crimson eyes. "I might have made some mistakes in the past that I'm still paying and repenting for, but I'm determined to make sure my family has all the tools at their disposal so they can have the best lives possible from now on. Shouto might be a brilliant pro hero with a fantastic future ahead of him, but he's not as proficient in other matters, mainly in how to keep himself alive and in a healthy, optimal condition. To make up for that, I will make sure he has the best support system in the world, one that isn't reliant on our side of the family, as that isn't something sustainable long term. He needs a life partner dedicated to him and him alone for him to be able to live his life to its utmost. And that's something you can't give him, Bakugou."

"Geez, you baby him way too much…" sighed Bakugou, lightly shaking his head at Enji's quick monologue. "Maybe if you hadn't fucked up his upbringing, he wouldn't be so terrible at anything that isn't directly related to his job as a pro hero."

"Uh…" That one had hit Enji right on an exceptionally sore spot. It was the truth; there was no way to deny it or to put it in a way that diminished Enji's role in it. "T-That's yet another reason why I want him to go through with the arranged marriage. I'm partially to blame for his inaptitude at most life skills, so I want to correct it by pairing him up with someone who can make up for his faults."

“Instead of going to that extreme right out of the bat, haven’t you ever thought about, I don’t know, *teaching him* those life skills?” Bakugou pointed out, feeling like pulling at his own hair for having to say something so obvious out loud. “He might be denser than a concrete wall, but he’s not dumb. With the right teaching methods and a bit of patience, he could easily learn those life skills he’s so bad at right now.”

“Believe me, we’ve tried that plenty of times,” insisted Enji, his brain recalling several instances where he and the rest of their family tried to teach this and that to the youngest member. “Both Rei and Fuyumi have tried to teach him how to cook whenever he came over to their house during school breaks, but they always ended up with a botched dish and plenty of broken cooking utensils. When he moved to his apartment, they also tried to teach him how to do every single household chore. But there’s a reason why one of them comes to his apartment on his days off to help him with that, alright? He’s not dumb, like you said, and he’s also extremely gifted in certain areas, but Shouto is simply not good at looking after himself.”

“Maybe you just suck at teaching him,” snorted Bakugou, a knowing smirk appearing on his face. Enji had been criticising Todoroki’s skills at household chores left and right, but Bakugou knew he hadn’t had any problems with that when they were cleaning their new apartment the previous day. Sure, it was a very basic cleaning, as the real estate agency that owned that unit had been taking care of it, but it still counted for something. It meant that all the time his family had spent teaching him had worked somewhat. And *that* meant he wasn’t a total lost cause. “I bet I could teach him in, like, one or two months, depending on how busy we are with work.”

“Oh? Really now?” said Enji, returning Bakugou’s smug expression with a smirk of his own. Would you look at that? The perfect way to bring that sham of a marriage to an end had been delivered to him on a silver platter. “You think you can teach him to be independent, I think that’s impossible. So why don’t we find out who is right?”

“And by that you mean…?” asked Bakugou very cautiously, already on his guard because of whatever was about to come his way.

“According to the law, you can get an annulment up until a month after getting married, with only business days counting,” explained Enji, already celebrating his easy victory in the back of his mind. “If you can teach him those life skills by the day before the last for that annulment timeline, I will give up and let you continue with your sham of a marriage for as long as you please. However, if you fail to do so, your marriage will be annulled on that final day, with no questions asked and no extensions allowed. Obviously, I’ll be stopping by unannounced from time to time to check on his progress. Also, you can’t tell him about any of this. I know how crafty and manipulative you can be. If Shouto knows about this, I’m sure you’d be able to find a way to cheat your way into a victory.”

“Hah, and why would I do any of that?” Bakugou retorted with an amused snort. He wasn’t about to fall for the same goading tactics that he used to trick other people. “I don’t gain anything from it. Plus, even if I do teach him those life skills, you could easily move the goal posts to get what you want. You have everything to gain from it, and we have plenty to lose. There’s no way in hell I’d accept such a lopsided challenge.”

“…Fine, I’ll throw you a little bone as a display of goodwill from my end,” grumbled Enji, not really on board with this concession. However, if it convinced Bakugou into participating in this huge gamble he was taking, then it would be worthwhile in the end. “Even if Shouto can only learn the bare minimum throughout this month-long deadline, if you can show you can fully make up for his faults without it affecting either of your work as pro heroes, I’d be willing to deem it as a victory for you two… This goes without saying, but neither of you can resort to external help. So no more food cooked by either Rei or Fuyumi, or help from them or your family to maintain the apartment in pristine condition. You two can only depend on one another for every single facet of your daily life, just like a real couple.”

“Oh yeah?” said Bakugou, deeply entertained by this unexpected development. It went to show that Enji had absolutely no clue how he had been living these past few years. Unlike Todoroki, he never once needed anyone else’s help to live on his own. Even if he had one more person to account for, it would hardly make a difference for the type of lifestyle he had. Not to mention, Todoroki was pretty good at following orders and instructions, so long as they were dictated in a way that brought forward no misunderstandings. It wouldn’t be that big of a challenge to get his ‘husband’ to be more self-sufficient in both cooking and household chores, if Bakugou were to base himself in these past few days he spent at his apartment. “Alright, we have ourselves a deal. And yeah, I’ll keep this a secret from your son. Whether he knows about it now or after the fact, there’ll be hardly any difference to the end result.”

“Hmph, you sure sound confident,” scoffed Enji, not a big fan of Bakugou’s smug expression. Nevertheless, they gave a handshake to finalise their secret bet.

“I’m good at everything I do,” snickered Bakugou, crossing his arms over his chest once again after the handshake. “If I could get a complete idiot to pass every single exam in U.A., I could also make a good spouse out of your oh-so-talented son.”

“I’ll believe that once I see it,” grumbled Enji, still very confident that *he* would be the winner in the end. “I can’t trust your words, since I can’t tell which is a lie and which is the truth. However, actions are a different story.”

“You do know that your son is a terrible liar, right?” pointed out Bakugou. He was very well aware that Todoroki was honest and straightforward to a fault, which made it pretty hard for him to lie to other people. He had been doing a good job at it so far, but there were one too many moments where he had blurted out stuff that he should have otherwise kept to himself.

“Yeah, I’m aware of that,” said Enji after a light chuckle. “I mean, who would believe him whenever he calls you ‘super cute’ and that you’re the only person he has ever thought of as cute in his entire life, no matter how many beautiful women he might have around him?”

“…uh…” Bakugou’s mouth was clamped shut upon hearing that. But no matter how much he frowned or pursed his lips, the wave of heat spreading all over his face was impossible to contain. Mission or not, just what exactly was his idiot ‘husband’ telling other people behind his back?

“……” Much like it had happened moments prior, Enji’s jaw nearly fell all the way to the floor upon seeing that uncharacteristic reaction from one of the most menacing, violent and no-nonsense pro heroes the country had ever had. It was the sort of reaction that was impossible to fake, no matter how good an actor someone might be. The blushing expression on Bakugou’s face was undoubtedly genuine, just like his son’s desire to monopolise their time together was.

“I-If you’ve said everything you wanted to say, then get going already! I’m busy!” hissed Bakugou after kicking himself out of that flustered stupor. He grabbed the door and started closing it, adding one final word as he did so. “Goodbye!”

The door was slammed shut without Enji making any attempts to keep it open. He had indeed said everything he wanted to say, for the most part. He even included a new plan that could potentially break them apart and ruin their sham of a marriage.

However, after seeing his son’s reaction and now Bakugou’s, some doubts were crawling all over his mind, burrowing into his brain in an attempt to set base in it. Amidst all the transparent lies, Enji couldn’t help but see a few glimpses of a bona fide relationship between the two of them, one that surpassed the grounds of friendship and dipped into something deeper.

“...Damn it, I feel like I’ve made negative progress by interrogating the two of them separately…” grumbled Enji under his breath as he turned around to his heels and walked back to the elevator.

He was in desperate need of a new plan, even though he had gained some extra time and a new pretext by creating that bet with Bakugou. If he didn’t…

Enji might have to accept that they were married in every single sense of the word, regardless of how such a marriage had started.

Chapter 39

“And with this… I’m done,” said Todoroki to himself, in a way congratulating himself for having completed the remaining packing.

His soon-to-be-former apartment had been stripped to its original form when he had moved in, if we were to ignore the mountains of cardboard boxes and piles of deconstructed furniture occupying nearly the entirety of his living room space. He had done most of the packing the previous few days, ever since Bakugou and he had decided to move in together to make their fake marriage more believable. Hence, all he had to do today was store away the things they had been using in the kitchen, turning off all of the home appliances (like his TV, and the fridge and laundry machine that had come with the apartment), gathering the bathing supplies in the bathroom, packing the few clothes, sleepwear and so on that he had been using these couple of days, and dismantling his bed while setting aside the mattress and bed sheets. All of that was accomplished a whole lot faster since the moment his father had left.

“What time is it?” mumbled Todoroki under his breath, fetching his smartphone from his pants’ pocket. By the looks of it, he had concluded everything right on time. The moving company that Bakugou had booked should be right around the corner. Just as he was thinking about that, his phone started ringing, with Bakugou’s name appearing as the caller ID. “Speaking of the devil… Hello?”

“Hey, I just got a call from the moving company, and they said they are parking their van in front of our apartment complex as we speak,” said Bakugou, cutting straight to the point with no greetings or niceties aside from that informal ‘hey’. *“I told them to get started with your stuff since I’m in the middle of something right now. Have them carry the stuff to be stored in the extra room first, then send them over to my apartment to do the same. This way, they’ll be the last thing to get removed from the van once we arrive at our new place. Since everything seems to be going according to plan, even with Endeavor’s interference, just proceed like we agreed last night.”*

“Okay,” acknowledged Todoroki with a small nod of his head. Leave it to his ‘husband’ to take into consideration even the tiniest of details. If the extra furniture that was to be stored away in the third room was in the back, and the furniture and cardboard boxes with stuff they’d be using on a daily was in the front, it would make furnishing and organising their new apartment a whole lot easier and more manageable, especially since they wanted it all done in a single day. He was slightly curious about one thing, though. “What is it you’re doi-”

“Alright, bye.” As was typical of Bakugou, he one-sidedly ended their phone call and cut off Todoroki while he was in the middle of asking him something.

I guess I’ll have to wait to find out what sort of evil scheme he’s plotting right now, sighed Todoroki in the back of his mind as he contorted himself to slip past the piles of boxes to get to his balcony. Bakugou had reassured him he wouldn’t do anything that could get him arrested or hurt anyone, but Todoroki couldn’t help but worry. The only reason he wasn’t being more insistent on finding out what exactly Bakugou was doing right now was that they were so busy with the move, which meant Bakugou couldn’t actually do anything about it until that was concluded - or so Todoroki’s sixth sense was telling him.

Once he finally got to the balcony door, he slid it open and went outside into the humid summer heat. When he peeked down at the street, he saw the stereotypical moving van parked right in front of their apartment complex’s door, plus the moving crew placing signs to warn both traffic and passersby of the ongoing moving operation. Todoroki also spotted a few paparazzi and reporters here and there, though they were being considerate this time around and giving the needed space for the moving crew to do their prep work.

From the headcount he had just made, Todoroki could tell there were fewer so-called ‘professional stalkers’ this morning. Maybe the short

interactions they had with them, plus a portion of them getting ticketed for reckless driving yesterday, were discouraging them from keeping up their vigil right in front of their apartment complex. That, or quite a few of them decided to follow Enji when they saw him leaving. Whatever the cause, Todoroki was glad to have a little break from that crowd and their endless questions and photos.

His doorbell rang moments later, so Todoroki returned to his apartment. He walked up to the entrance area and pressed the button in the intercom that unlocked the building's front door. To signal which apartment the moving crew was supposed to go to, Todoroki left his front door open. He then returned to the living room area.

One of the things that Bakugou had drilled into his brain these past few days was to make sure there was a clear distinction between the items to be stored away and the item which would be in use throughout their fake marriage and temporary cohabitation. Todoroki admittedly sort of half-assed his packing and piled the boxes completely at random, with the only care being directed to a couple of words written with a permanent marker to inform others of the box's contents, plus their size and weight.

However, he followed that very important instruction from Bakugou down to a tee. The furniture and boxes that were to be stored in the extra room had been piled up on the left side of the living room, which was closer to the small corridor that led to the entrance. On the right side of the living room, plus a portion of his bedroom, were the items that they'd be using in their new shared apartment.

Bakugou had also made sure to send him his side of the results of the rock-paper-scissors competition they had partaken in to decide whose furniture they would use and which would be stored away. That made it even easier for Todoroki to place each box or disassembled piece of furniture in the correct 'group'.

In a matter of minutes, the moving company crew was courteously

entering Todoroki's apartment. Following Bakugou's instructions, Todoroki provided the crew with a quick rundown of how they wanted their belongings to be placed inside the moving van. Todoroki was slightly surprised at how appreciative they were of receiving such clear instructions, plus having all belongings accurately labelled and positioned according to those instructions. Todoroki figured that the majority of people moving weren't as methodical and obsessively organised as Bakugou was, a rare trait that the moving crew seemed to value with great esteem.

Then again, that was always how it went whenever Bakugou was concerned. Those who simply saw him and how he talked and behaved from a distance tended to dislike him or have a poor opinion of him. However, anyone who actually worked alongside him in any capacity ended up deeply respecting him and hoping to get more opportunities to work together in the future. Bakugou was a brash, violent man with nearly no filter for the things that came out of his mouth, but he was also extremely talented in all facets of his job and personal life and a great leader who knew how to make the most out of those with whom he worked.

Plus, unlike other big-name pro heroes, he had no problem with doing menial tasks that were usually relegated to sidekicks or staff members if that was the most optimal way to get stuff done. Even when they were students and doing their internship at Endeavor's hero agency, Todoroki remembered seeing Bakugou helping with paperwork in the HR department or organising documents and files in the archive room whenever he wasn't outside patrolling or honing his moves in the training grounds. None of those tasks were part of their internship; Bakugou had done them of his own volition just because they made it easier on him when he was out there in the field. It was now rare for them to work together, with Todoroki still being at Endeavor's hero agency and Bakugou moving around from hero agency to hero agency as needed, but he suspected he still went about his job as a pro hero the same way he did during the internships.

Because of his menacing demeanour and rough communication skills, Todoroki doubted that most staff members and sidekicks said it straight to his face, but he was sure every single one of them was very

appreciative of Bakugou's role as Great Explosion Murder God, Dynamight. Had they not, Bakugou certainly wouldn't be requested to help out by so many hero agencies in so many different prefectures, even if he was undoubtedly one of the strongest and most skilled working pro heroes in the country.

Now that I think about it, we're moving in together into an apartment in this city, but there's a very big possibility that he gets called over to a different area of the country at some point, Todoroki realised as he helped to push some of the boxes closer to the entrance, so the moving crew could take them downstairs to the van. That particularity of Bakugou's work schedule was something he hadn't given much thought to until now. The city they resided in was certainly Bakugou's main workplace, as the majority of the hero agencies he partnered with were within the city or in cities close enough that he could easily commute to and from in a single day. But it was inevitable that, one day, he received a team-up request or mission somewhere further away that would get him absent from his home for a while - how long depended on the mission itself, but it could span from a couple of days to over half a month.

Todoroki had been living alone in his apartment just fine for the past two years or so, but he had to admit that these few days that Bakugou had pretty much spent at his place had been absolutely heavenly. Once they started truly living together and got used to each other's presence there every day, Bakugou's absence would probably be greatly felt…

Bakugou will probably want to stay around here because of the villain group trying to headhunt him, so I don't think he'd be willing to accept any requests too far away from here, but if it's an emergency, he would have no other choice but to go… Todoroki sighed in the back of his mind, his expressionless demeanour fully hiding the sadder mood he had switched into thanks to those thoughts. Perhaps it would be a good idea to discuss this matter with Bakugou as soon as possible, in preparation for such an eventuality. That way, they'd know how to maintain the façade of their fake marriage while doing long-distance.

…No, that was just an excuse, and even Todoroki could see that amongst his characteristic denseness. They were going to live together again at long last. He wanted that time spent with Bakugou to last for as long as possible, since it had a still undefined deadline in the faraway future. Todoroki had even told as much to his own father, saying he wanted to be able to enjoy his alone time with his 'husband' without third wheels around cockblocking them.

Was this sort of monopolistic desire yet another feature that came along with their marriage certificate?

That was a good question to ask his older brother, Natsuo. He had married his long-term girlfriend, and they now lived together as husband and wife. Natsuo probably would be able to tell him if he also started feeling this needy about his spouse the moment they signed their marriage papers. They weren't married yet, but maybe he could also ask a thing or two of Midoriya and Uraraka. They were already living together, as that was the setting that benefited their relationship the most. Maybe they could tell Todoroki what they felt like when one of them had to be away due to a mission elsewhere. This way, Todoroki would have different points of view and personal experiences he could compare with his own to come to a concrete conclusion.

So far, what he knew was that he *really* liked being around Bakugou - the closer the better, in fact - and was constantly thinking about their reunion whenever they were apart. Even right now, with them being just one floor away from each other, Todoroki felt like there was this monumental distance separating them. He had felt the exact same way the previous day, when he was getting a couple of things from Bakugou's apartment. But the moment he saw Bakugou sitting on his sofa, that nagging anxiety faded away, and by the time they were getting it on at that very same sofa, that feeling had already been completely forgotten.

None of that felt bad or wrong or inconvenient, so Todoroki could only interpret it as something that normally happened to married people. They were technically on their honeymoon, which was

considered the most emotionally charged phase of a relationship. Maybe as time went on, the separation anxiety, too, would disappear into a fleeting thought that crossed his mind every now and then.

Hmm… I feel like something about that conclusion doesn't make much sense…, said Todoroki to his own buttons, head tilted to the side as he crossed his arms over his chest. *I've been thinking the same way about the excitement and desire I feel about kissing and touching Bakugou, but it only keeps on getting worse and more intense instead of diminishing into a new normalcy… I must be missing or overlooking something really important if I keep finding myself stuck in the same logical error.*

A marriage was truly a complex status quo, one that required quite a lot of work, cooperation and communication. Todoroki could already tell as much, even though his marriage to Bakugou was nothing more than a convenient plot device to solve their individual problems. Maybe expressing all of this directly to Bakugou, his 'spouse', would be the best way to crack this layered mystery once and for all. But on the other hand, Bakugou wasn't exactly the best communicator when it came to feelings. He'd either call it stupid and move on to a different topic or simply shut down and close himself somewhere else to avoid it altogether.

I guess I should keep all of this to myself only and observe things for a little while longer, concluded Todoroki after thinking about this conundrum for a good while. If he still couldn't reach a concrete answer after all of that, he would then decide whether to first ask for outside perspectives on this matter or go directly to Bakugou. Things were pretty good between him and his 'husband' right now, so he didn't want to carelessly disrupt that by starting any type of drama or friction. *It's not like knowing will change anything. I can take my time figuring all of this out while enjoying my married life with Bakugou. Oh, and also work on those issues with my father and that villain group pursuing Bakugou. We are steadily making progress with Dad, but nothing has happened on Bakugou's side of our deal yet. That is kinda worrisome, to be honest…*

Todoroki had talked extensively with Bakugou about the villain group

trying to recruit him to their side and their quest to conquer the whole world. They wanted him not only because of his strong Quirk, but also because of his genius strategising and the fact that he had singlehandedly dethroned the previous villain king, All for One. In their crazy minds, he was the one and only heir to the role of top dog in the villain underworld. Adding that to the fact that they saw him more as some sort of living god rather than a regular human being… Yes, that was the perfect recipe for a very intense and long fight against that secretive group.

With how frequent their presential interactions with Bakugou and attempts to catch his attention had been in the past, the fact that they had been so quiet these past few days was a bit strange. Bakugou's conclusion was that either their marriage had disillusioned them somewhat and they were now fighting amongst themselves, or they were getting ready for something pretty big and disruptive. In Todoroki's most honest opinion, he'd bet it was the latter. He had personally witnessed how much Bakugou attracted and captivated those on the villain side. While their marriage could make some rethink their desire to bring Bakugou to their side, the most obsessive ones definitely wouldn't think much of it. If anything, some might even see it as a way to also drag Todoroki to their side, as some sort of buy-one-get-two deal.

Bakugou must still be getting daily reports from Best Jeanist about this case. Since he hasn't said anything so far, they really must be pretty quiet right now, inwardly said Todoroki, his brows getting slightly creased with a frown. That meant those who had been arrested so far were not being cooperative in any capacity. Following and shadowing them was also useless, as they were too good at staying hidden and making their pursuers lose track of them. Infiltration attempts always failed, too, and they had yet to discover how they recruited new members to their villain group. *With how slow this unofficial mission is moving, it might take months or maybe even longer than that to get them all.*

Weirdly enough, that thought cheered up Todoroki quite a lot. Even if they somehow managed to end his family feud with his father for good, their marriage would continue until they also concluded Bakugou's side of their deal. That meant Todoroki wouldn't have to

worry about their fake marriage turning into a divorce any time soon. Those thoughts gave him some mixed feelings, as he didn't want anything bad happening to Bakugou or bystanders because of that villain group's goals. But at the same time, the harder and longer the case was, the longer his fake marriage to Bakugou would be, something that he was 100% all for. As far as Todoroki was concerned, he wouldn't mind keeping it going for several years or even for over a decade.

Just as Todoroki was happily thinking about his future cohabitation life with his 'husband', the moving crew came up to him to inform him that the first phase of the move of his belongings was completed. Bakugou's belongings that would be stored away for the time being were next.

I don't know if he's already done with whatever it is he's plotting next, so I'd better check with him first, Todoroki told himself as he grabbed his smartphone from his pocket. It only took two rings for Bakugou to pick up the call with a grumpy, "What now?" How very much like him. "My things for the extra room are all in the van. Can I send the moving crew to your apartment, or are you still busy with that thing you're working on?"

"Nah, I'm done with that. Feel free to send them here," said Bakugou with a less confrontational voice. *"Also, while we're at it, we might as well deploy that plan we agreed on last night."*

"You think now's the right time for that?" asked Todoroki, an eyebrow slightly arched.

"Yeah. I know those damn professional stalkers are still around and paying close attention to the move," explained Bakugou after a small sigh. *"They will definitely find it strange how much stuff the moving crew is carrying to the van. So you can bet this is the perfect time to give them a little something to keep them entertained and happy, rather than coming up with stupid, bullshit theories of their own."*

“Alright then,” acknowledged Todoroki with a quick nod of his head. If Bakugou was on board with doing *that* now, Todoroki was also all in on it. Once he ended that phone call, he told the moving crew they could start doing the same thing with the apartment downstairs while following the exact same initial instructions they had been given.

Once the moving crew was out of his apartment, Todoroki walked up to two boxes that had been kept separate from everything else. He easily grabbed them both and carried them to the entrance of his apartment. Todoroki made sure he had his keys in his pocket before he exited the apartment and pressed the button to call for an elevator. It took a little longer than usual, since the elevators were working full throttle today with the amount of use they were being given, but once it stopped on his floor and the door slid open, Todoroki promptly stepped inside and pressed the button for the ground floor.

Everything was pretty calm and chill in the lobby area of the apartment complex, but the moment Todoroki stepped outside of the building, several paparazzi and journalists walked up to him, cameras and recording devices in hand.

“Is today the official moving date for you and Dynamight, Shouto?” asked a young man, his eyes sparkling with enthusiasm for the opportunity to speak in person with such a well-known pro hero.

“Yeah,” confirmed Todoroki with a nice and simple answer. He carried the two boxes to the van, keeping his distance from the paparazzi and journalists, but still giving them full visibility of what he was doing. Once the boxes were placed inside the van, he picked up the top one and placed it in front of the bottom box. With that move, it was revealed that the bottom box hadn’t been properly tapped shut. Todoroki looked around briefly, faking to search for a solution for this ‘accident’. Since there was obviously no packing tape around, he took a few steps backwards and looked up to the balconies of his apartment complex. Todoroki then shouted, “Bakugou, throw me a roll of packing tape!”

Those words obviously caught the attention of every single paparazzi and journalist, as they all knew that Bakugou had spent the night at Todoroki's apartment. They readied their cameras, pointing the lens at the balcony of pro hero Shouto's apartment so they could capture the moment pro hero Dynamight emerged.

Unfortunately, they were aiming at the wrong target.

"I told you to stop ordering me around!" hissed Bakugou loud and clear as he walked into the balcony… right below Todoroki's apartment. Despite his moody response, he still threw the requested roll of packing tape, which Todoroki easily caught with both hands.

A multitude of gasps and confused 'huh?' spread all around Todoroki, with some of the journalists even counting the floors to make sure they hadn't been paying attention to the wrong balcony. But no, there was no mistake there. Dynamight had just casually appeared from the apartment right below Shouto's, like it was an everyday event. Soon, the confusion turned into incredulous yelps as they connected all the dots one by one. Some even muttered 'No way…' under their breath.

"Heh. Oh no, you finally figured out where I live," said Bakugou as he leaned his arms and upper body on the railing of the balcony. His tone and smug facial expression were obviously dripping with fake shock and playful sarcasm. "It took you more than three years to do it, but hey, congrats, I guess."

He really enjoys toying around with other people, doesn't he? Todoroki chuckled in the back of his mind. He was pretty bad at reading other people's facial expressions and body language, but he could always tell whenever Bakugou was gleefully content for one more successful malicious trick.

Bakugou had spent over three years working hard to make sure his address was not leaked, often using Todoroki to keep himself hidden in plain sight, and he was now reaping the delicious reward for all of that scheming and sneaking around. Of course he was enjoying the sight of all of those flabbergasted faces and dumbfounded reactions.

Well, we'd better get ready for one more big scandal, and to break social media and the internet yet again… Todoroki sighed at his own buttons, not all that bothered by any of those inevitable consequences.

If anything, he was quite happy to see Bakugou enjoying himself so much - evil trickery notwithstanding.

Chapter 40

After that big reveal, the street where the apartment complex was located got busier and noisier, but the moving company had already been warned that such a possibility was very likely. The moment fans, journalists and the paparazzi started getting in their way, they cordoned off the area around the building's entrance to make sure none of that crowd impeded their work.

Thanks to that, the rest of the move went swiftly and without further problems. The moving crew transported Bakugou's belongings to be stored away into the van, and then started the whole process from the start at Todoroki's former apartment, this time with the furniture pieces and packed boxes that would be in use, followed by the same with Bakugou's other half of his belongings. All in all, their entire possessions were placed inside the moving van in around 3 hours.

Both Bakugou and Todoroki helped the moving crew now and then, but they mostly let the pros do their thing so as not to get in their way.

"We'll be going ahead to the new apartment to get things prepared for you guys," said Bakugou to the leader of the moving crew. He sent him their new address by text, and then walked away to reunite with Todoroki, leaving the crew to finish up the remaining stuff and collect the tape and other items they used to cordon off that portion of the street. "Let's get going to our new place."

"Will they follow after us or something…?" asked Todoroki, his head tilted to his right to take a peek at the busy-looking moving crew.

"I've given them our new address already. We're going there first to get stuff ready, and we'll meet them there once they're done here," explained Bakugou shortly and concisely. "Have you already locked

up your apartment? Also, did you double-check every room to make sure you didn't leave anything behind?"

"Yeah, and yeah," confirmed Todoroki with an expressionless thumbs-up. "I also did as the real estate agency told me to do, and dropped the keys I had inside the mailbox. They'll pick the keys up once they come to check my apartment for any damage and all that usual stuff."

"Great. Then we can really get going," said Bakugou with an acknowledging nod. It seemed his 'husband' remembered everything he had drilled into his brain during last night's briefing. This yet again confirmed that it wouldn't be all that hard to teach Todoroki to be more independent and better at household chores and cooking, unlike what Enji had alluded to. *Hah, I've pretty much won that bet already! Sounds like denseness is a trait passed down from generation to generation in the Todoroki family tree.*

"I'll drive us there," Todoroki declared right away, taking the car keys from his pocket and then protectively holding them in his hands.

"Yeah, yeah, go right ahead," dismissively acknowledged Bakugou with a quick roll of his eyes. He was too busy keeping up with his schedule to waste time arguing with Todoroki over who got to drive their temporary car.

As it had become usual, they calmly walked to the parking lot where they were keeping the car from Endeavor's hero agency that they were borrowing, followed from a certain distance by a small crowd made up of fans, paparazzi and reporters. It was nothing out of the ordinary, and the group was much smaller compared to the beginning of the week.

"'Guess we'll have to lose them all over again," sighed Todoroki as he turned on the engine and started driving the car out of the parking lot.

Since they were using the same parking lot as always, this time some of the ‘professional stalkers’ already had their own vehicles there, ready to follow them to their new home.

In their initial plan, they intended to reveal where their new apartment complex was located, as some sort of bait, and to further prove their ‘relationship’. However, after everything that had happened that week so far, Bakugou decided to remove that entirely from their plan. Instead of revealing their new address, they would keep it secret like their life depended on it - which might actually be the truth, as far as Bakugou was concerned. Bakugou was already a pro at keeping his address a complete secret from everyone and everything, and Todoroki was capable enough to utilise the same techniques and methods he did with a bit of training.

“Wanna switch with me?” suggested Bakugou, already cracking his knuckles and turning his head from side to side to stretch his neck.

“Definitely not,” deadpanned Todoroki, his voice a bit more expressionless and yet a touch more vehement, too. He was definitely not letting Bakugou drive like a maniac ever again. “I’ve also received driving lessons on how to lose cars that are following me. I might not employ the same methods as you, but they work just as well.”

“Tsk…” Bummed with that answer, Bakugou crossed his arms over his chest and let his body slump down on the front passenger seat just a bit.

Unlike how Bakugou had gone about it previously, Todoroki was very calm and drove at a very safe speed. He knew that area very well, so he used the traffic lights and side streets to lose their pursuers. There were only two cars this time around, which enabled Todoroki to complete that challenge fairly fast and swiftly. Once he had made sure they were no longer being followed by any vehicle, he finally drove them to their new apartment complex.

“By the way, what about the van being used by the moving crew?” asked Todoroki, now that he had the leeway to drive as leisurely as he preferred. “Aren’t they also going to get followed all the way to our apartment?”

“Worry not, I thought about all of that ahead of time,” reassured Bakugou with a dismissive wave of his hand. “This moving company offers a special moving service for clients who need a bit more discretion and secrecy due to their jobs, families and so on. It’s way more expensive than your regular move, but well, considering our circumstances, it was money well spent.”

Most moving companies catered to your everyday citizen, who didn’t need any additional security measures. But both Bakugou and Todoroki were very famous public figures, one of whom was currently being targeted by a villain group. Bakugou had no other option than to pick a moving company that catered to the cream of the crop in terms of wealth and political power. This company, in particular, could even help people who wanted to disappear without leaving any traces behind. Their services were far more expensive than those of normal moving companies, but their expertise was also that much better for needs like theirs. Bakugou didn’t know how exactly the moving crew would drive the van and what sort of techniques they would employ to lose any vehicles following them, but he was sure they had that under control, according to all the reviews and recommendations he had read online.

Once they arrived, Todoroki parked the car in the same parking lot, just a bit further down the same street as their apartment complex. The way they went about entering the high-security was more time-consuming and complex than what they were used to, but it was just a matter of getting used to it. Todoroki figured that after a week or two of living there, he’d unlock the two reinforced entrance doors like he had been doing so his entire life.

Their apartment was exactly like they had left it yesterday after that

tense cleaning session. The living room area's current emptiness was quite stark, especially compared to the open-concept kitchen next to it, which was already completely furnished. The very first thing Bakugou actually did was go to the kitchen and turn on the fridge. They had their bento-style lunch with them already, and only a few food items were being transported in the moving van, so they would have to go grocery shopping very soon.

"They'll let us know when they arrive, so what should we do meanwhile?" asked Bakugou, setting down the pouch with their bento-style lunch on the kitchen counter.

"There's not much to do in an empty apartment," deadpanned Todoroki. He could see the same emptiness as Bakugou did, even without a close inspection of their surroundings. Todoroki gave it a quick thought, though, and only one thing came to his mind. He, too, walked into the kitchen and stopped right behind Bakugou, his hands on the counter caging him between his arms. "Since we have nothing better to do, and we'll be really busy for the rest of the day, we might as well catch up and make up for our daily quota right now."

"We've never agreed on any quotas or amounts…" grumbled Bakugou as he slowly turned his head and looked over his shoulder at Todoroki. It was such an awkward position, but his 'husband' still went for it and kissed him a couple of times, always very lightly.

"Yeah, well, it would be quite hard to count while we're in the middle of it," pointed out Todoroki with a laid-back shrug. He placed one of his hands on Bakugou's hips to turn his body towards him some more. Whenever he was making out with Bakugou, the only thing in Todoroki's mind was his 'husband' and nothing else. He tried to make such a point even more obvious by kissing him again, this time much more easily, which also aided in turning it into a deeper kiss.

"Mmmh, haa…" Little gasps and sighs every now and then leaked out of Bakugou's parted lips whenever Todoroki pulled away for no more

than a fraction of a second.

Todoroki found those unintentional sounds to be beyond charming. It was oftentimes what fueled Todoroki to keep going and, as a consequence, escalate things.

“Haa… Hey, the moving guys can show up at any time now. Don’t you dare pin me down once again,” warned Bakugou, his reddish cheekbones scrunching up a little bit with a light frown. He knew very well how quickly and suddenly Todoroki went on the ‘attack’; he might as well impose a clear boundary right from the start while he still could do so.

“I know, don’t worry,” Todoroki acknowledged half-heartedly, bridging the small gap between their faces with one more delicious kiss. The hand that had been standing motionless on Bakugou’s hip also started moving anew, casually slipping inside his t-shirt while tugging the fabric upwards. He was halfway up his chest when his lower arm got pinched.

“This might not be pinning down, but it’s still way too risqué, you horny moron,” grumbled Bakugou, giving a couple of pulls to the piece of skin he was pinching.

“.....” Todoroki immediately put a dissatisfied frown on his face, an expression that was beyond rare on someone who had a perpetually blank demeanour.

“Sulking won’t change anything, so you can quit it with that face already!” scoffed Bakugou, not falling for Todoroki’s childish attempts at getting what he wanted. “No matter what you say or do, a no is still a no.”

“No, that’s not it,” said Todoroki, slowly shaking his head. Despite the pinching occurring, he still slid his hand upwards and put even more of Bakugou’s torso on display. “I’m just annoyed that my father saw all of this. You really should have woken me up the moment my father stepped inside my former apartment.”

While yes, he was sulking just a tiny little bit that his making out with Bakugou had to be kept in such tame grounds, that wasn’t the reason why he seemed so bothered and angry. The fact that his father had seen Bakugou’s plump chest and all the hickeys and little nibble marks Todoroki had left there while pleasuring his ‘husband’ was the true culprit for that unusual facial expression. He couldn’t do anything about the hickeys on Bakugou’s neck, so he had long made peace with them being exposed to the public whenever they were in someone’s presence. But the same couldn’t be said about the ones placed in areas that were covered by clothes every single day. Todoroki was extremely annoyed that Enji had the gall to pull up his t-shirt and inspect his body directly, like he was some sort of good for sale that was being appraised.

They were legally married, which made Bakugou his by default. Of course, the same could be said about the reverse - Todoroki now belonged to Bakugou too. That was why Todoroki believed that his father’s unnecessary actions were as much of a problem for his spouse as they were for him. An offence or attack on Bakugou was also an offence and attack on him, and vice versa.

“Pfft, you always worry about the weirdest of things,” snorted Bakugou, yanking Todoroki’s hand from his torso before he pulled his t-shirt back down. “It helped cement our so-called ‘relationship’, which is a plus in my book. Just forget about it and move on.”

“Just because it benefited our mission doesn’t mean I have to like or approve of it,” deadpanned Todoroki, speaking from the heart on this subject. “We can convince my father that we’re really a couple without resorting to showing off what you look like after having sex with me.”

“W-Well… You’ve got a point there… I guess…” mumbled Bakugou, his crimson eyes averting Todoroki’s straightforward heterochromatic gaze. Without any warning, Todoroki lunged forward once again and stole yet another kiss from him. “Mmmh! W-What now!?”

“You were being too cute, I couldn’t resist,” explained Todoroki before he once again kissed Bakugou and then licked the remnants of all that tongue action from his pouty lips.

“…One of these days, you’ll annoy me so much with that ‘cute’ bullshit, that I’ll make you homeless for a week or two…” grumbled Bakugou, his words sounding quite threatening, but his tone was far too half-hearted for him to seriously mean any of it.

“Like I told you before, that’s something I can’t compromise on,” declared Todoroki with a quite serious tone. He lightly kissed Bakugou’s forehead and then finally let go of the kitchen counter. “Just get used to it already.”

“There’s no way I’ll ever get used to being called something so demeaning!” Bakugou argued back, his pout only intensifying further.

“Demeaning?” repeated Todoroki, his head quizzically tilted as he tried to figure out this set of complaints from his ‘husband’. “Isn’t ‘cute’ and ‘adorable’ a compliment?”

“Maybe for a woman, yeah, it is! But for a man, it only sounds like you’re making fun of me or something along those lines!” explained Bakugou in a particularly frustrated manner. He found it ridiculous that he had to spell out something that should be obvious to any man on planet Earth, and yet, here he was, having another vocabulary discussion with the dense but smart man he ended up marrying. “Only

a very small percentage of guys want to be called that, and I'm not in that group. So each time you call me cute straight to my face, it rubs me the wrong way."

"That wasn't my intention, though," admitted Todoroki, following his usual route of blunt honesty for this discussion. "'Cute' is simply the only fitting word I can use to describe you whenever I look at you. I've thought so even when we were at U.A. But that doesn't mean I'm comparing you to a woman or looking down on you. It's just something I see in you that most people wouldn't ever notice or even think about. I know that you're very strong, capable, independent and someone with radical mood swings and an attitude that could scare even villains. But among all of that, there are moments where you are 100% pure cuteness. Maybe others wouldn't see it that way, but… I definitely do. Is that something weird? Am I doing a bad thing without knowing?"

"Ugh… I wanna say that yeah, it's both weird and bad, but when you put it that way…" mumbled Bakugou under his breath, his face now turning downwards. He felt like his cheeks were releasing a ridiculous amount of steam right now - he was totally not in the right condition to be looking someone in the eye. He wanted to end this conversation as soon as possible, preferably right now. But, at the same time… Bakugou couldn't help but be curious as to why someone would think of him in such a radical and shocking way. "W-What… Uhh… What even makes you… think of me as c-cute…?"

"Are you sure you want to ask that now?" Todoroki innocently asked, even though his question could be interpreted as having some teasing undertones. Just like Bakugou had said, the moving crew could show up at any moment, and his list of what made his 'husband' seem so cute in his eyes was pretty long. Todoroki didn't think they'd have enough time to cover everything right now. But since Bakugou hadn't said anything, he deemed that to be his way of giving him the 'go-ahead' sign. He cupped Bakugou's hidden face with both his hands, the pleasant heat coming from them radiating into his palms, and he slowly forced him to lift it back up and look at him. "Well, to begin with, this adorable expression you get whenever you're feeling embarrassed or shy."

“...uhh…” A small groan escaped from Bakugou’s pursed lips, his face growing twice as hot in a matter of seconds. Now he was absolutely certain that he wasn’t in a condition that should be seen by anyone, much less by Todoroki. He wanted to yank his hands from his face and push Todoroki further away from him, but it was as if he had gotten entranced after that one sentence. Or maybe his accelerated heartbeat but steady breathing rhythm was making it impossible for his red blood cells to carry the correct amount of oxygen to his other cells and vital organs, which was causing his body to become weaker and more sluggish than usual. Yeah, that was definitely it. All in all, Bakugou was getting swept away by Todoroki yet again, bullshit human biology excuses or not.

“Then there’s the way you-” Just as Todoroki was moving to reason number two, his voice was interrupted by the ringing of the doorbell. *Sigh… Cockblocked yet again…*

“Y-You know what? I don’t wanna know after all, you weirdo…!” yelped Bakugou, using this interruption as his cue to stuff his elbow into Todoroki’s gut and then stomp towards the intercom by the entrance door of the apartment as fast as the speed of light.

Japan wasn’t a country with a tipping custom, but Bakugou was seriously considering offering each member of the moving crew a very generous bonus for this save they had just (unknowingly) performed to perfection.

Chapter 41

Thanks to the moving crew made up of extremely experienced workers, the move was progressing at a very great pace. In what seemed like the blink of an eye, their previously empty living room was now decorated with all sorts of pieces of furniture in all stages of assembly and piles of packing cardboard boxes.

The moving crew carried each piece to their correct room, but left everything else up to its owners. That forced Bakugou and Todoroki to focus on different areas of the apartment to keep up with the fast pace of the moving crew.

Todoroki stayed in the living room, assembling the furniture that belonged to him. He still remembered how to put them back together, as he had recently taken them apart, but it required a fair amount of focus not to accidentally make a mistake that would put its structural integrity at risk. Todoroki had actually 'won' quite a lot of times in their lengthy match of rock-paper-scissors when they were covering the living room area, hence why he had decided to start with that area. Plus, his new bed was booked to be delivered in the afternoon only. He had to entertain himself with something else until then, or else his excitement would drive him crazy.

Bakugou, on the other hand, was working both in his bedroom and the kitchen as the moving crew brought his belongings in. He only reassembled some of his bedroom furniture for the time being, just so he could store away his clothes and other belongings as they arrived and free up more space in his new bedroom by getting rid of all those cardboard boxes. His bed could wait for a later time, since it was such a simple job.

With those tasks out of his way, he could finally focus on the kitchen. When he was cleaning it the previous day, he had made a mental map of where he wanted to place this or that. Since his kitchen utensils and appliances would be the ones being used in their shared apartment,

for the most part, Bakugou had organised his packing boxes in a way that the contents of each one went to a specific cupboard or section of the kitchen. The moving crew also made sure to prioritise the couple of boxes that had both his and Todoroki's food stuff, to avoid any spoilage or contamination, so filling their fridge was yet another of Bakugou's first tasks.

Yeah, we definitely need to do some grocery shopping very, very soon, Bakugou mumbled to himself as he inspected the fridge's contents and made a mental list of everything that was missing. He would later on write that mental list on a piece of paper, as that was a good starting point for Todoroki's secret household caretaking lessons. Grocery shopping was an essential chore for independent living. Todoroki definitely had some experience with that already, but Bakugou was taking his bet with Endeavor very seriously: he wanted to see how Todoroki did his grocery shopping so he could correct any bad habits and then push him towards the optimal way to go about it for someone with such a busy work schedule. *As for cooking… Ugh, I know how much of a disaster he is when it comes to that. The fact that his mother and sister already tried to teach him what I can only assume to be some simple recipes, but still ended up with poor results, tells me this is going to be my biggest challenge. That photo of curry he so proudly showed me literally looked like dog's wet food, for fuck's sake... I guess I'll make him observe how I cook for now while I sort out his grocery shopping habits.*

Bakugou hadn't had a lot of time to think since he made his so-called bet with Endeavor, but he was already formulating a game plan for it. Todoroki was bad at anything related to housework, yes, but he wasn't completely incompetent. For as much as Bakugou hated to admit it, Todoroki was actually really smart - his only actual problems were his limited experience with anything that isn't pro hero related due to his crappy upbringing and his bottomless denseness. However, if he could do well when it came to schoolwork, Bakugou could also develop a method to make him do well with housework.

To make things as simple and easier on both of them as possible, Bakugou decided to divide the housework lessons into multiple categories - although he was still debating whether he should

approach them one by one or all at the same time. The one-by-one method was the most foolproof one, but he was working on a deadline. If he followed through with it, he would have to decide which were the most key teachings for independent living while making up for the remaining faults himself.

It's been a while since we've lived in the same shared space, so maybe I should first evaluate him in different areas. Then I can decide what needs to be prioritised and what I can leave for a later time, concluded Bakugou in the end. He'd begin with what he already knew Todoroki was bad at - cooking - and build his kitchen repertoire from the basics all the way up bit by bit. That's why he'd make Todoroki observe him as he cooked at the same time he worked on improving his grocery shopping game.

As for the remaining household chores and other matters people needed to deal with in their day-to-day life, Bakugou would come up with something after this initial evaluation period. He might have spent 2 whole days at Todoroki's former apartment, but it was during the moving process. Bakugou needed to see how Todoroki acted on a regular day.

Well, he had no complaints when we made that deal for food in exchange for dishwashing and a shared grocery bill. I doubt Todoroki will throw a tantrum about being in the kitchen with me while I'm making our food, added Bakugou as he switched from the fridge to the cupboard where he was storing the dry and canned goods, adding a few more items to his mental list. *If anything, he seemed a bit too eager to be my temporary legs… But I'll be damned if I let that happen ever again! I'll get him so busy with learning all of this stuff that he won't have any time left to seduce me ever again, mark my words!!!*

With that declaration made deep in his mind, Bakugou proceeded with the remaining kitchen cupboards, filling them one by one with your usual cooking utensils, cookware and the plates and bowls the dishes were served on. By the time he was finishing the last cupboard, he heard the electronic beeping of an alarm he had never heard before.

The answer was provided to him fairly fast, with the lead crewman coming up to him to inform him that their lunch break would be starting now and would last for about an hour. Obviously, the moving crew would not be eating at their clients' new home, so they excused themselves and left to get the grub and rest they so very much deserved.

"Should we take this opportunity to also eat our lunch?" suggested Todoroki, already eyeing the bento lunch boxes on top of the kitchen counter. "I'm already done assembling the dining table. We won't need to eat at the counter this time."

"Yeah, we might as well," agreed Bakugou, quickly checking the time on his smartphone. He was surprised it was already 1 PM, but time did tend to fly by particularly fast when someone was focusing on a task. He went to wash his hands in the kitchen sink while Todoroki expressionlessly, but with a happy stride, took the bento lunch boxes to the dining table. That had been a pretty comical scene, so Bakugou couldn't help but comment on it. "Well, someone sure seems eager to eat lunch. Did you work up an appetite thanks to the moving and having to use your brain for the furniture assembly?"

"Yeah, kinda," said Todoroki as he carefully removed the lunch boxes from the linen bag Bakugou had placed them in. "But it's more because I'm looking forward to eating your food again and getting the remaining half of the reward you tricked me into."

"Hey, like I said earlier, it's your fault you created unreasonable expectations for the reward I mentioned," Bakugou pointed out in his own defence. He'd also like to add that he had given him plenty of hints to what the reward would be through his wording, but well, this was Todoroki he was dealing with here… Of course those words and hints swooshed right past him.

“I know, but I still have the right to complain,” added Todoroki as his final remark on this matter. He, too, quickly went to wash his hands and then returned to the dining table, taking a seat right next to Bakugou. He momentarily threw him a side glare for his choice in seating, but didn’t say anything about it, which meant Todoroki was in the clear.

Bakugou opened the bento lunch boxes one by one, with each box carrying a different assortment of food he had prepared earlier that morning while making breakfast. It was just the right amount for two hungry young men after such a hectic morning. It was heavier on the carbs than protein, something that Bakugou had done on purpose so they’d feel fuller for longer - hopefully until their moving was nearly completed and his kitchen was fully operational.

“Everything looks as delicious as this morning’s breakfast,” said Todoroki after offering his thanks for that meal spread. He grabbed one of the salted salmon rice balls with one hand and picked some of the bean sprout salad with his chopsticks with the other. “It’s amazing how you can cook all of these different dishes without consulting a recipe book.”

“I’ve made them so many times by now that I’ve memorised everything already,” scoffed Bakugou with a quick shrug of his shoulders, also grabbing himself a rice ball. For Todoroki, this bento-style lunch seemed like an extraordinary thing, but for the one who had cooked it, it was just an everyday thing. On the days he knew he’d be at a hero agency during lunch time, he prepared a bento lunch box for himself, making it from scratch in the morning while preparing his breakfast, or adding in some of the leftovers from the previous day’s dinner. *This is yet another thing I’ll have to teach this idiot, I guess…*

“How do you usually come up with them?” asked Todoroki, sincerely curious about the more domestic side of his hissy ‘husband’. He would have liked to have asked all of these questions when they were students, but back then, he probably would have gotten yelled at for it. Now, with Bakugou a bit more grown-up and willing to have

lengthy adult conversations when in a reasonably good mood, Todoroki could finally do it. “Do you just look up recipes online or do you come up with them on your own?”

“When I’m out and about doing my rounds, I like to try out new dishes and stuff at restaurants or convenience stores during my lunch break,” explained Bakugou while grabbing himself a slice of tamagoyaki with his chopsticks. “Whenever I really like one of those dishes, I look them up online and then tweak the recipe here and there so it’s more agreeable to my palate. Which usually means I make it spicier or add this or that seasoning to enhance a specific flavour profile. I also get some recs sent to me now and then.”

“Oh. By who?” inquired Todoroki, now even more curious by that detail. His first thought was Kirishima, since he was in Osaka, a region well-known for its cuisine and excellent restaurants. But the way Bakugou sort of froze for just a second made Todoroki scratch off that theory. He wasn’t saying anything, but the way he was intently staring at Bakugou was enough pressure to get an answer out of him eventually.

“.....by your sister.....” mumbled Bakugou under his breath, quickly stuffing his mouth by taking a huge bite out of the rice ball.

“Eh…?” blurted out Todoroki, his mouth frozen mid-chewing. He forced himself to swallow the food in his mouth right away and placed down his half-eaten rice ball. “Fuyu-nee sends you recipe recommendations? Since when?”

“Ugh… We all stayed in the same hospital after the final battle against the League of Villains, right?” Bakugou started explaining after venting some of his annoyance with that initial groan. “I bumped into her when I was on my way back to my hospital room after a physiotherapy session for my arm. She said she had other recipes I might like, so we exchanged contact info back then. From there on, it

sort of became a habit for her to send me recipes whenever she thinks they'd be right up my alley, judging by how much I liked her mapo tofu…"

"Huh… I had no idea you and Fuyu-nee had been texting each other this whole time," said Todoroki, still in the middle of digesting this highly unexpected piece of information. Fuyumi had never mentioned keeping in contact with one of his friends, so he truly had no idea this was happening behind the scenes.

"Pffft… Texting…" snorted Bakugou with a dismissive roll of his eyes. He fished his smartphone out of his pocket and unlocked it, promptly opening his messaging app with just one hand. "It's just her sending me recipe links and me replying with a thumbs up or thumbs down after I make said recipe. See?"

What an unusual texting history…, noted Todoroki in the back of his mind, his heterochromatic eyes closely observing the screen as Bakugou scrolled through his 'conversations' with his sister. It truly was nothing but links from Fuyumi and thumbs-up or thumbs-down emojis from Bakugou. No other words were exchanged at any point. Todoroki knew Bakugou wasn't all that social, but his sister was quite good at getting along well with everyone and was a great conversationalist - both skills she had developed throughout the years as a teacher. It was unlike her to simply send someone a link without saying anything else. However, since this unusual exchange had been going on for literal years, from how lengthy the message log was, it seemed to work just fine for the two of them. "I wonder why she never said anything about this…"

"I obviously asked her to keep it a secret," said Bakugou with a quick shrug of his shoulders, locking his phone once again before he returned it to his pocket. "The guys at the dorm already made plenty of fun of me for being such a 'good homemaker' and the 'ultimate housewife'. What do you think they'd do if they somehow found out I've been receiving recipes from your sister?"

“Ah… Yeah, that would have ended up in mass murder…” deadpanned Todoroki, solemnly nodding his head. Bakugou had already exploded with their former classmates plenty of times for those nicknames. If Fuyumi’s recommendations had been added to it, too, Bakugou probably would have lost it completely and sent them all back to the hospital, even with a recovering broken arm.

“Plus, think about it from the perspective of your family,” added Bakugou, his tone changing to something more serious but also quite fed up. “With how crazy your father is about that arranged marriage thing, if he found out his only daughter was routinely texting with a man for literal years, who knows if he wouldn’t force us to get married. Ugh, I shudder at the thought of that alone…”

Thank god Fuyu-nee kept this a secret, Todoroki inwardly sighed in relief. For some reason, the thought of Bakugou marrying his sister didn’t sit well with him at all. It got his chest feeling all heavy and stuffy, and his guts were even churning themselves into knots. Todoroki saw Fuyumi and Bakugou getting along well as a positive thing, but just as friends or acquaintances with a shared interest, or even as in-laws who gave one another tips on this and that. But marriage between the two of them? No, that was out of the question. No way, no how. That could never happen. Definitely. No matter what. *It’s a good thing I got married to him before this recipe exchange was accidentally leaked to Dad. I’ll also make sure to keep this information a secret from him, just to play safe.*

“So does that mean some of the recipes you’ll be making were recommended by her?” asked Todoroki, now that he had recomposed himself and returned to eating their lunch, this time by trying out the spinach side dish.

“Kinda,” said Bakugou after a shrug, taking his time chewing before continuing with his answer. “Most of the things I cook aren’t in their original recipe form. I always end up changing them a bit. I think the only exception is your sister’s mapo tofu. That one was perfect right from the start.”

“Which is why you asked her for the recipe back when you and Midoriya had dinner at my father’s place, and then it evolved into this whole recipe exchange thing a while later,” added Todoroki, filling in the gaps all on his own with the information he already had. Bakugou simply nodded while taking one more slice of tamagoyaki. He took another bite of the salted salmon rice ball as he thought, *How interesting.*

In one way or another, Bakugou seemed to always end up somehow connecting himself with his family. There were the more obvious things, like their friendship and the fact that Bakugou did some internships under and worked together with Endeavor, his father. But there were also the more subtle things, like his and Fuyumi’s secret recipe exchange, the fact that he had saved Natsuo when a villain targetted Endeavor’s family (something which Natsuo and even Enji were still thankful to him for), and that Dabi - or in other words, Toya - was the one who had successfully completed Bakugou’s kidnapping.

There wasn’t as noteworthy a connection between Bakugou and Rei, but Todoroki had the feeling that was about to change thanks to this mission. After all, Bakugou did regard her very highly in terms of helpfulness for their goals. That was something Todoroki knew would please his mother quite a lot. Not to mention, when he and his mother tag-teamed him, they managed to make Bakugou accept an invitation to go see them, supposedly so that Rei and Fuyumi could formally congratulate them for their ‘marriage’.

Ah, speaking of which… That’s yet another thing we’ll have to fit into our schedule, Todoroki suddenly reminded himself. He returned his gaze to Bakugou, who was quietly eating his lunch. With how hissy and fussy Bakugou was, having him go there would be like pulling teeth. *Maybe I should keep it a secret from him and drive us there at some point during the weekend. That way, both Mom and Fuyu-nee will be there even if we show up unannounced.*

“...What now?” grumbled Bakugou, sideways glancing at Todoroki

with a certain suspicion as he grabbed a bit more of the side dishes with his chopsticks. His sixth sense had just pinged really loudly. That meant there was a big probability that Todoroki was or would be up to no good… He was going to tell him off as a preemptive strike against whatever that 'no good' was, but a closer inspection of his expressionless face made him sputter into laughter. "Pfffft!"

"…???" Not understanding this sudden and quite radical mood change, Todoroki tilted his head in confusion. That made Bakugou let out a full-blown 'Hah!' while setting down his chopsticks.

"No wonder your father wants to give you a full-time 'nanny', you're pretty much a helpless baby stuck in the body of a pro hero, down to the way you eat," snorted Bakugou, reaching out to Todoroki's face and picking up a couple of grains of rice stuck to him.

"I'm no baby…" said Todoroki with a sulky tone, his expressionless face even gaining some dissatisfied creases. To prove that he was very much the man he looked like, he grabbed Bakugou's wrist before he could withdraw his hand. Rather than going for the cliché of Bakugou eating the pieces of food he had just cleaned from his face, Todoroki reversed that on its head and ate the grains of rice directly from Bakugou's hand, his lips and teeth slowly moving down until his fingertips.

"…You're so lucky I always wash my hands before eating," sighed Bakugou, more creeped out by Todoroki's attempt at proving whatever point he was trying to make than anything else. "Keep eating food directly from other people's hands, and you'll quickly find yourself stuck to the toilet seat for a good couple of hours, if you're lucky."

By the looks of it, by reversing the cliché move, Todoroki had also switched which one was known for being dense. However, Todoroki had a secret card up his sleeve that cancelled any denseness he might perceive: his blunt honesty.

“No, I was trying to show you I’m a man, not a baby,” explained Todoroki, since he could tell Bakugou had completely misunderstood his actions. Would he have to be even clearer than that for him to get it? He was still holding onto Bakugou’s hand, and Todoroki made use of that to the max. He turned Bakugou’s arm slightly and gently kissed his inner wrist, which was followed by some playful nibbles, each one inching up closer to Bakugou’s lower arm.

“H-Hey! I get it already…!” yelped Bakugou, inwardly panicking just a little bit. Yes, definitely just a tiny, tiny little bit of very stoic panic. The ticklish sensation of Todoroki’s lips and teeth made his arm tremble time and time again, until he finally made the decision to yank it free. Bakugou wasn’t exactly counting on dragging Todoroki along with that pull, though. He came at him with an intensity and precision that no infant would ever be able to display, no matter how skilled they might be, which finally successfully proved Todoroki’s point.

At the very least, this time, Todoroki didn’t make Bakugou fall out of his seat as he kissed him passionately, only stopping once even he was getting a little too lightheaded. The big gasp for air Bakugou let out while he looked away, his cheekbones as red as candied apples, had a certain allure to it that left Todoroki wanting for more.

Sadly, Todoroki had to hold himself in check. They were in the middle of eating lunch, during an hour-long break in their moving process. There was no time to get all flirty and frisky. Todoroki sat back down on his chair, wanting nothing more than for the move to be completed at long last so he could finally have Bakugou all to himself without any interruptions.

“Sorry, I got too ahead of myself once again,” apologised Todoroki, urged to do so because of Bakugou’s uncharacteristic silence and lack of admonishments.

“……Is it really that much fun to jump me at completely random moments?” grumbled Bakugou. By the low yet calm tone of his voice, he seemed to be more pouty than straight-out angry at what Todoroki had just done.

“That’s not……” started Todoroki, but he stopped himself right afterwards. What was he even supposed to say to a question like that? Was it fun to kiss Bakugou whenever he felt like doing so? Well, the answer to that was way more complex than a simple yes or no. It was so complex, in fact, that not even Todoroki himself could comprehend it in full yet. All Todoroki knew so far was… “It’s not a matter of being fun or not. I just want to, so I do it.”

“Hmph! That doesn’t really answer anything, now does it?” scoffed Bakugou, his poutiness ballooning more and more. “Then again, what else did I expect of Mister Denseness over here? Getting an answer out of a wall would be easier than one out of you…”

“I’m not so sure about that, but… sorry,” apologised Todoroki a second time, once again uncertain of what he should tell Bakugou. They stayed completely silent for a couple of minutes as they resumed with their lunch. That gave Todoroki some more time to think and then blurt out, “Can’t that just be the whole answer?”

“Huh?” grumbled Bakugou. Out of all the things he could imagine Todoroki would say, that had not been one of them. It was on the same level of ‘answer that wasn’t really an answer at all’ as the previous one.

“It’s like when we had sex for the first time. You were all about the should’s and shouldn’t’s, but all I cared about was that we could,” explained Todoroki, trying his best with his choice of words. He was speaking about something he wasn’t entirely sure of, so, once again, he didn’t want to restrict himself now or in the future by claiming any absolutes. “Maybe it’s a matter of me having bad timing with this sort of stuff, but you yourself said you’re not against it and that it feels

good enough you might get addicted. So doing it because we want to do it should be okay as an answer, right?"

At first, Bakugou opened his mouth, possibly to say something, but he quickly closed it and turned back to the table. The same silence of before returned, a touch awkward but not strained or unnerving. Perhaps it was now Bakugou's turn to do some thinking of his own.

They kept eating their lunch as casually as before, until nothing was left in the containers that were used as bento lunch boxes. As per their agreement, Todoroki was the one who sorted them out and brought them to the kitchen to be washed.

Todoroki was still in the middle of washing the first container when Bakugou also came to the kitchen and stopped a couple of steps away from Todoroki.

"I agree with you on one thing. Why make something needlessly complicated when there can be a simpler explanation or solution, right?" spoke Bakugou with his serious tone, rather than his moody or belligerent one. "I might be 'act first, think later' in many ways, but this isn't one of them. So I'm not as on board with that 'doing it because we want to do it' as you are for several reasons. I just don't feel like picking it apart right now."

"For someone not on board with it, you're surprisingly easy at going with the flow when it comes to it," deadpanned Todoroki, recalling several different times Bakugou had done the exact opposite of what he was claiming right now.

"T-That's all on you!" Bakugou retorted, pointing an accusatory finger at Todoroki before he crossed his arms over his chest. "Stop trying to get in my pants 24/7 and I will stop being a freakin' hypocrite!"

“Sure, but when it’s not me doing it, you’re the one jumping me,” pointed out Todoroki, purposely leaving unsaid that Bakugou’s tsundere tendencies were present regardless of which case they were speaking of. “Don’t forget this all started when you kissed me at my dad’s office.”

“Grrr… I also remember saying that was the first and last time that would happen afterwards…” said Bakugou, once again deflecting the ‘blame’ Todoroki was so masterfully pinpointing back at him.

“And that didn’t last for very long, did it?” deadpanned Todoroki, landing the winning argument, judging by the way Bakugou was now silently glaring at him. “Bakugou, if taking the ‘blame’ bothers you that much at this point in time, feel free to continue laying it all on me. It’s not like you’re giving me any reasons to stop what we’re doing, be it the daily kissing quotas, be it sleeping with you.”

“.....You’re so annoying when you’re not being dense,” grumbled Bakugou as he turned around on his heels and stomped into his bedroom to continue working on his stuff there while Todoroki was washing the dishes. He did leave some parting words, though, by yelling from a distance, “Go back to being dense! Switch that crap back on! Now!”

I don’t think this has an on and off switch, though, Todoroki chuckled to himself, also resuming with the dishwashing.

This wasn’t a complete conversation; it hadn’t even begun to scratch the surface of what was shared and what was still buried underneath years of unsaid words. But it seemed to be good enough for the current them, the fake married couple with an unofficial mission weighing on their shoulders.

Chapter 42

“We’re finally done…” sighed Todoroki as he let his body fall on the sofa, now that he was done seeing off the moving crew.

“I’m never doing a house move in a single day ever again…” groaned Bakugou, already taking his well-deserved rest on the sofa, the back of his head fully lying on the top of the backrest. “I’m pretty darn sure we just created a new Guinness record or something…”

“I wouldn’t know, but if you say so…” deadpanned Todoroki, not all that knowledgeable about what his ‘husband’ was referencing. Either way, it was a good thing that they had accomplished this portion of their mission within the deadline they had set for it.

Their shared apartment was fully operational, their extra belongings and pieces of furniture had been professionally organised by the moving crew in the room they had declared as a storage area, and Todoroki’s brand-new ‘marital bed’ was fully assembled in his bedroom. It had been a full day of hard work with only some occasional breaks, but the results spoke for themselves. Now, they were free to use the remaining days of their vacation to further their individual goals… and for their very first proper ‘date’.

“Ah. I just remembered we forgot to do one thing,” Todoroki said out of the blue, his relaxed sitting position perking up into one as straight as an arrow. A second later, he was already up on his feet and picking up Bakugou from the sofa, hoisting him over his shoulder like it was nothing.

“Not this bs again!” hissed Bakugou, thrashing all four of his limbs around in retaliation for the unwelcome carrying. “You’re no longer my legs! Are you in the mood to be kicked, is that it, you stupid masochist!? Or do you just never learn, no matter how many times

you get kicked for this exact thing!?”

“It’s just easier and quicker this way,” calmly explained Todoroki, carrying Bakugou to his bedroom despite all the hissing and wiggling. His ‘husband’ was certainly harder to deal with than an apprehended villain or criminal, but Todoroki knew he was not in mortal danger, no matter how much Bakugou raged about it.

“If you told me what you’re doing, maybe it wouldn’t!” Bakugou retorted, hitting Todoroki’s back a couple of times with his elbow. His guard was raised even higher when they passed the threshold to Todoroki’s bedroom, but for some reason, his sixth sense wasn’t pinging as loudly as it had earlier while they were eating lunch. “Just what the hell are you- Wah!”

Bakugou couldn’t help but reflexively yelp when he was suddenly dropped like a big sack of flour right in the middle of Todoroki’s now spacious bed. He quickly regained his composure and sat up, only to nearly bump face-first against Todoroki’s. It was hard to tell whether it had been the sudden drop or something else, but his heart sure did prove how well and fast it could pump his blood now, despite all of its previous damage.

“Is this bed and mattress still up to your sleeping standards, or have you changed your mind on it?” asked Todoroki, pushing his hands against the mattress to test both its firmness and softness. That obviously got them both lightly bouncing up and down on the bed, a movement that might have helped Bakugou break free of his stupefaction.

“Couldn’t you have just asked me that *before* carrying me all the way here yourself!?” hissed Bakugou, unable to resist the urge to slap the top of Todoroki’s head for this extremely confusing and misleading bed testing.

“Oh. I guess I could have,” admitted Todoroki, his head slightly tilted as he gave that suggestion some consideration. Bakugou, on the other hand, loudly groaned in exasperation and flopped back down on the mattress.

“I know I told you to switch back on the dense, but this is too much… Yeah, yeah, this bed is perfect, or whatever it is you want me to say right now…” sighed Bakugou, inwardly wondering if maybe he had been experiencing a small bout of insanity on the day he agreed to do all of this with Todoroki. While he rolled his eyes at Todoroki’s demeanour change into a slightly more pleased expressionlessness, all because he had gotten Bakugou’s approval, he just so happened to notice a little something. “Wait, why the heck haven’t you made the bed yet? I thought you said you were done with everything.”

“Oh, that,” said Todoroki, briefly glancing at the bare mattress before looking right back to Bakugou. “I don’t have any bedsheets that fit this mattress size.”

“.....” It was rare, but sometimes even Bakugou got completely speechless at someone else’s stupidity and lack of planning. This was one of said rare instances. He slapped both of his hands on his face and slowly dragged them downwards as he tiredly sighed, “Nevermind the sainthood, I deserve the fucking Nobel Peace prize for this mission… Why on earth did you not buy some bedsheets and all the other bedding stuff *while* you were buying the new bed!?”

“I forgot,” Todoroki replied with a quick shrug. All that was coursing through his mind while they were at the furniture store had been their ‘marital bed’ and the fact that they were on a fake date. Of course he had had no mental space left for any of the little details.

“I’m starting to wonder if your brain also has an on and off switch that is barely ever used…” groaned Bakugou as he pushed Todoroki aside so he could sit up. “C’mon, let’s get that sorted out. If we rush, we might be able to find something at a mall or whatever.”

“Oh, are we going on another ‘shopping date’?” asked Todoroki, nearly jumping out of the mattress together with Bakugou. He had been planning on using several of the bedsheets that were too small for this bed for the time being, but he was always up for one more outing with his ‘husband’.

“It’s not a shopping date, it’s a normal grocery store run with an additional stop at the home decor section of whichever home goods store is still open!” corrected Bakugou right away, no longer in the mood to humour Todoroki’s misguided fantasies. But soon after those words left his mouth, a certain idea popped up in his mind.

Wasn’t this the perfect time to initiate Todoroki’s training?

Bedding items weren’t the only thing they were in need of, and Bakugou still had his mental grocery list perfectly memorised. This was a great opportunity to observe how Todoroki went about doing his grocery shopping.

The only problem was that Bakugou was now the official chef of their household and, hence, also in charge of all the groceries. If he told Todoroki to be the one doing the shopping independently, there was a big chance that he’d suspect that something wasn’t right. Todoroki was dense, yes, but he wasn’t *that* much of an idiot.

How do I go about this one? Bakugou wondered to himself as he walked to the living room. In that short while, he put together something last-minute but workable enough with what he had at his disposal.

“You know what? Forget what I just said,” declared Bakugou as suddenly as he turned around to face Todoroki, who had been following him around like an expectant puppy. As usual, Todoroki

simply silently tilted his head at that backtracking. “I know something even better than a ‘shopping date’.”

Oh no… Todoroki had no idea what to make of that extremely atypical declaration, but since this was Bakugou, he was sure that nothing good was about to come out of it. Best-case scenario, he was about to be tricked yet again.

Todoroki carefully followed Bakugou with his gaze as he made a sharp turn towards the kitchen and grabbed a small notepad and pen from one of the drawers. His curiosity was certainly piqued, especially when he saw Bakugou starting to write something down on the notepad, but he remained at a safe distance while awaiting any kind of instructions.

“I’m way too tired to kick you for picking me up yet again, so instead of that, I’m going to psychologically torture you,” announced Bakugou while he ripped that page from the notepad. It was all done with a calmness that highly contrasted with his shocking one-sided proclamation. “I’ve written a grocery list of everything we need to buy so we don’t have to eat seasoned cardboard for dinner. It’s nothing too big or complicated, as my previous kitchen was well stocked with all the essentials and so on. I’m gonna give you, let’s see, 15 minutes to check the fridge and the cupboards and figure out what we need to buy. Then you’re gonna buy them at the grocery store. You get a gold star with each correct item. As for what will happen if you pick the wrong thing… Well, that’s where the psychological torture comes into play, hehehehe.”

“Wouldn’t it be easier if you just gave me the list and I went alone while you rest at home?” deadpanned Todoroki, the one and only reaction he could have to such a far-fetched ‘divine retribution’.

“Yeah, but that wouldn’t be fun, would it? For me, that is,” snorted Bakugou, a smirk already starting to blossom on his lips. “And just so you don’t accuse me of tricking you and whatnot later on, this here is

a legit grocery list. And we also truly need to buy some things if you want your dinner to match the same level as today's breakfast and lunch. But if you're not in the mood to get those gold stars, it's no skin off my back. I can also do the grocery run just fine on my own, tired or not. So pick your poison and fast. I'd like to get started with dinner as soon as possible, or it's gonna mess up my sleep schedule."

"...What exactly do you mean by 'gold stars'...?" Todoroki asked cautiously, first glancing at the notepad page Bakugou was holding up and then switching back to that mischievous, smirking face of his. Unfortunately, he was too far away to read the list, but it did look like Bakugou had truly written a few things on that piece of paper.

"You'll find out as soon as you get one," cryptically said Bakugou with a dismissive shrug. "And no, it's not that cheek pinching you like so much. It's also not homemade food. Our deal has started, so I can't use that trick again until our mission is completed."

"That's not much of a clue," pointed out Todoroki, an eyebrow quizzically arched. "So far, there's no reason why I should play along with this new torture game of yours."

"It's something you annoy me with every single day. I figured it's about time I regain some control over it and annoy you with it instead," sighed Bakugou, relenting just a tiny little bit. After all, if he didn't manage to convince Todoroki into doing things his way, he wouldn't be able to evaluate him like intended.

That still doesn't narrow it down, Todoroki said to his own buttons, unable to figure out what exactly those 'gold stars' could be. He did quite a lot of things on the daily that annoyed Bakugou - actually, it was easier to say what didn't annoy him than what did. However, since it was something that Todoroki partook in himself, those 'gold stars' couldn't be anything that bad or dangerous. The psychological torture aspect was seemingly the only thing that Todoroki would have to be on the lookout for. *Then again, Bakugou also does that to anyone*

whenever he feels like it, whether he has a reason for it or not. Usually, it revolves around using someone's weakness against them or demanding something completely unreasonable out of them… which are all things he already does to me, now that I think about it. I guess there's no actual downside to this new evil scheme, huh…

"Okay, I have 15 minutes, right?" inquired Todoroki, just to make sure Bakugou hadn't started the countdown already. In the end, his curiosity about those 'gold stars' won him over. The dubious pros were far more captivating than the well-known cons.

"I'll go get ready to leave while you're doing your thing, then," said Bakugou, waving the shopping list up in the air as he made his way out of the kitchen and to his bedroom. "Also, make sure you bring a good disguise with you. I'm still not in the mood to deal with those annoying professional stalkers. They might not know where we moved into, but they are definitely still looking for us."

"Got it," acknowledged Todoroki as he opened the fridge and very closely observed its contents. Bakugou had previously told him that his cooking skills had gone way up since he started living on his own, and that today's dinner would be on the same level as the breakfast and lunch he had made. It wasn't a lot, but he would use those two known facts as his main guidelines for this 'game'.

Once he was done with the fridge (and the freezer portion too), Todoroki moved on to the cupboards. He had to open several doors until he finally found where Bakugou had stored the rest of their cooking goods. He then used the same choosing process and guidelines with those.

Okay, I think I have an idea of what could potentially be in that list, mumbled Todoroki in the back of his mind as he closed the final cupboard. He was about to go to his bedroom to also get ready to leave when he noticed a pair of objects on top of the kitchen counter: it was the notepad and pen Bakugou had used to write the shopping

list.

“.....” Todoroki stared at the notepad for what seemed like a long, long time. The piece of paper at the top was obviously blank, but that didn’t diminish his interest in it. Now, it was just a matter of Todoroki deciding if he should play according to Bakugou’s rules or if he should use them against their creator.

“Your 15 minutes are up, Half-and-Half Bastard!” yelled Bakugou from inside his bedroom. That was what finally urged Todoroki into making up his mind and ripping the top sheet from the notepad. By the time Bakugou popped up again, that piece of paper was securely stuffed inside Todoroki’s pocket. “Go get ready so we can leave.”

“I’ll be the one driving,” deadpanned Todoroki, changing the topic completely so he could disguise his own trickery as best as possible. Besides, calling dibs on who got to drive was always a good idea.

“Grr… I already told you I’m an excellent driver and only use those risky manoeuvres whenever there’s an emergency,” grumbled Bakugou, his cheeks slightly puffy as he pouted at the unspoken reason behind Todoroki’s urgency in deciding who would be the driver this time around. “Now hurry it up!”

“Okay, okay,” chuckled Todoroki, picking up his walking pace as he moved to his bedroom. As he went to fetch his wallet and the car keys, he also looked around for where he had put his stationery. It was a quick find only because he had literally organised his entire bedroom today, so their location was still fresh in his memory. Using a pencil sideways, he carefully covered the notepad sheet with a thin layer of graphite. That unveiled what had been written on the sheet of paper that had been above it, thanks to the pressure made as Bakugou wrote the shopping list. Now *I see. So this is what Bakugou wants to buy for today’s dinner…*

To leave behind no evidence of his sneaky little trick, Todoroki crumpled that piece of paper and threw it away in the bathroom's trashcan. He had the solution to Bakugou's psychological torture game and, as such, would be able to quickly find out what the 'gold stars' were. Now he just had to make sure Bakugou didn't find out he was cheating by purposely making some mistakes while picking the grocery items.

"I'm ready to go," announced Todoroki as he exited his bedroom and closed the door behind himself.

"No, the fuck you are not!" yelped Bakugou as soon as he saw Todoroki's so-called disguise. Despite it being summer, Bakugou had put on a jacket with a hoodie and was holding a face mask. That alone should keep his identity a secret even in the middle of a crowded store. However, Todoroki's idea of a disguise was basically just normal streetwear. "This is exactly why you are caught and doxed so easily!!!"

"I mean… it's not as easy to hide my identity as it is for you, so I kinda have given up on trying," admitted Todoroki after a small sigh. Bakugou could make do with just a hoodie and a face mask, but he would have to literally cover his entire head with a paper bag or something to disguise himself. That would make him more conspicuous and suspicious than just going somewhere as he was. Plus, it wasn't as if he had all that much free time to walk around outside while working. His previous address wasn't found on day 1; Todoroki still did his best not to stand out too much whenever he was off the clock as pro hero Shouto.

"That's cuz you're way too lazy when it comes to stuff like this!" Bakugou accusingly pointed out as he glared the heck out of his 'husband'. Not that complaining would magically fix this predicament. It seemed that Bakugou would have to once again step in and do all the work for Todoroki. He grumbled and grumbled under his breath as he stomped back to his bedroom, where he stayed for a couple of minutes looking for the things he needed. Once he came out again, Bakugou went straight to the sofa rather than the entrance. "Sit down for a bit."

“Okay,” said Todoroki, despite all the question marks floating around in his mind. He, too, walked up to the sofa and took a seat at the exact spot Bakugou was pointing to. Once there, Bakugou grabbed his shoulders and turned his upper body a bit, so he could more easily access the areas he wanted.

“Geez, the more time I spend with you, the more I end up agreeing with your father,” grumbled Bakugou, this time loud enough for Todoroki to hear him. But regardless of how much he was complaining, he still painstakingly combed Todoroki’s hair back with his fingers until he had enough of his longer hair strands to make a very tiny low ponytail with it. He then stuffed one of his brandless baseball caps on his head, having made sure to pick one that would match the clothes Todoroki was currently wearing. Still not done with his masterful disguise skills, Bakugou stepped to the side and crouched down in front of Todoroki, making sure that his easily recognisable white and red hair was all tucked inside the cap, especially his long bangs. As a finishing touch, Bakugou placed sunglasses on him, which helped to partially cover the burn scar on the left side of his face. “There! This is how you do it! Any questions?”

“Can you do this for me every day?” blurted out Todoroki without even meaning to. It might have slipped out of his mouth unintentionally, but he could tell right away how selfish and entitled such a request was. However, he just couldn’t help himself; he did wholeheartedly want that selfish request of his granted. Even though Bakugou sounded so mad and huffy-puffy at him, his hands had been so gentle throughout the entire ‘makeover’. His passive-aggressive words did not show in his actions, yet another thing that was quite rare for him. Maybe that was why Todoroki had gotten too ahead of himself and asked for the unreasonable. He awkwardly averted Bakugou’s stumped face, even though the sunglasses were hiding his heterochromatic eyes pretty well. “...Sorry, that would be impossible, I know. I guess I’ll have to try a little bit harder and learn how to do this on my own.”

“...Y-Yeah… Yeah, that’s exactly it! Watch and learn! Maybe that way

you can show your father you don't need any of his 'ideal brides'!" declared Bakugou as soon as he snapped out of it. That question had come out of left field so unexpectedly that even he didn't know how to react to it until Todoroki corrected himself.

"Won't people find it odd that I'm wearing sunglasses and a cap when it's almost sunset or while inside a store?" asked Todoroki, this time with a question that was actually pertinent to the topic they were discussing.

"Unless someone figures out who you are, people usually couldn't care less about what others are wearing or doing," said Bakugou with a dismissive shrug. "They might notice it, but they'll forget all about it five seconds later."

"Oh, I guess that's true," acknowledged Todoroki after thinking it over. He, too, barely paid any attention to what complete strangers were wearing or doing, as long as they weren't breaking any laws. Initially, Todoroki thought it was just a him thing, since he didn't care about fashion or how other people lived their lives and expressed themselves. But from what Bakugou was saying, it seemed he was actually in the majority when it came to this 'stranger blindness'.

"Now that everything is *truly done*, let's get going," Bakugou ordered, getting up from his crouched-down position and straightening his clothes. "Given where this apartment complex is located, there should be a shopping centre or a mall or two somewhere nearby."

"Feel free to lead the way while I drive," deadpanned Todoroki, making sure the car keys were securely inside his pocket and hadn't been stolen by Bakugou without him noticing. Fortunately, his 'husband' seemed to be far more interested in his new so-called torture game than in arguing about driving equality and fairness.

This time, they both walked out their front door without any further issues after putting their shoes on. It took a while for Todoroki to adjust to the shade of the sunglasses, but by the time the elevator had arrived on the ground floor, his vision was as good as usual.

“By the way… We might be going outside in disguise, but we should still act as a couple just to play safe, right?” asked Todoroki as they casually walked towards the first of the two entrance doors of the apartment building. The back of his fingers lightly brushed against Bakugou’s hand, making it quite clear what he was alluding to.

“Hmph! This might be an unofficial mission, but I’m still taking it very seriously,” scoffed Bakugou with a dismissive tone. It was pretty much the same type of non-answer that he liked to throw around so much. For Todoroki, however, it was the green light he was waiting for to capture Bakugou’s hand without getting scolded for having done so right afterwards.

Obviously, Todoroki made sure to hold his ‘husband’s’ preferred hand.

Chapter 43

After a quick internet search on their way to the parking lot, both Bakugou and Todoroki agreed to change their initial shopping plan. There was actually a shopping street not too far away from their new apartment complex. That short distance made driving there more time-consuming and troublesome than simply walking, since your regular shopping street would most likely have all the items they intended to purchase. So they turned around, backtracking all the way to their departure point, and then took off in the opposite direction.

The sunny afternoon was in the initial stages of changing into the early evening, but the humid air kept the summer temperature as stifling as it had been throughout the entire day. Students dressed in several different sets of summer school uniforms could be spotted walking back home after their club activities, some alone, some in pairs or small groups, some riding their bicycles on their own or with a law-breaking tag-along. Men and women dressed in business attire were another recurrent sight, equally returning home after a busy day at work. As they approached the shopping street, the majority of the business-oriented adults were replaced by mothers accompanied by their young children as they hunted down the last sales of the day and even more students hanging out with their friends by the local family restaurants and fast food joints.

“This seems to be a very lively neighbourhood,” Todoroki commented as he casually observed their surroundings from behind his sunglasses. The more people he saw on the street, the more he feared their identities would be exposed. However, much like Bakugou had told him earlier, most people only threw them a quick glance - most likely due to spotting the unusual sight of two men holding hands - before completely forgetting about them and moving on with their day. By the looks of it (no pun intended), their disguises were working perfectly fine.

“Lively but pretty safe, from what I can see,” added Bakugou with a small shrug of his shoulders. The sound of happy chattering and people walking had completely swallowed the sound of the nearby

cars as soon as they stepped inside the shopping street. A police officer stood by the counter of a traditional Japanese sweets store, talking joyfully with the elderly chef on break rather than policing the non-existent crime around them. “Then again, this is a much fancier neighbourhood. Of course things are peaceful around here.”

“Oh. Now that you mention it, that’s true,” said Todoroki, only now noticing that facet of their new address. He should have clocked in on that much earlier, seeing as their apartment complex was a newer build with extensive security measures, but the cheap rent had made him overlook that important detail. Most of their neighbours were most likely paying a pretty penny to live in that apartment complex, putting them at a higher financial level. The surrounding buildings were of a similar style, albeit with different construction dates and floor numbers. Their previous apartment complex was also located in a very nice neighbourhood, but this one was certainly at a whole new level. “I guess we won’t have to worry about having one of your cult followers as a neighbour. ”

“Yeah, this has nothing to do with that,” sighed Bakugou while he rolled his eyes at that dim-witted comment. “Most of the ones I’ve arrested so far had no criminal history, and they came from all sorts of backgrounds. Being rich doesn’t stop evil idiots from being evil. In fact, having money makes them twice as hard to catch since they can just throw money at their problems and buy their freedom without any consequences.”

“Can’t you be a little bit less pessimistic?” deadpanned Todoroki, inwardly sighing at Bakugou’s lack of faith in the goodness of other people.

“Can’t you be a little bit more realistic?” Bakugou retorted right away without a care. “Well, not that any of that matters right now. Focus on your current mission. I’m itching to torture someone, and since it can’t be them, it’s gotta be you.”

“How heroic and motivating of you,” deadpanned Todoroki yet again, his voice sounding even more monotone this time around. He didn’t want to rub his hissy ‘husband’ the wrong way, though, so he kept the majority of his complaints to himself. Not to mention, he didn’t want to accidentally shoot himself in the foot by blurting out his cheating plan. Todoroki had memorised the short shopping list he had secretly acquired, and he wanted to apply that knowledge as soon as possible so his own curiosity over those mentioned ‘gold stars’ could be satiated at long last. “Can we do the grocery shopping there?”

“Yeah, suit yourself,” acknowledged Bakugou, dismissively glancing at the grocery store franchise Todoroki was pointing at. The shop in question seemed to be your quintessential grocery store, and with the amount of movement going in and out, it looked like the right choice. *I guess he at least already knows how to pick the appropriate stores for grocery shopping. That’s one less thing I’ll have to teach him. I know this isn’t the best way to observe how he usually shops, but it was the only plan I could come up with to go grocery shopping with him while leaving him in charge of the buying… Well, I should see how this one goes for the time being. If it doesn’t work out like intended, I’ll come up with a better plan for a later date.*

Todoroki walked inside the grocery store hand-in-hand with Bakugou, confident he had this ‘torture game’ won already. However, he met his very first obstacle almost right away.

Hold on… Since I’m in charge of the shopping, that means I’ll be the one carrying the shopping basket AND picking up the items from the shelves, Todoroki mumbled in the back of his mind, his hand standing right above the top shopping basket. *I’ll need both of my hands for that… Which means I can’t hold Bakugou’s hand anymore…*

“What now? Hurry it up,” ordered Bakugou, pointing at the shopping baskets with a jerk of his chin to urge Todoroki to pick one up. But instead of doing so, Todoroki simply stared at him like he had just told him to kick a puppy or something along those lines. It was an expression tragic enough to leak out from underneath his usual deadpan demeanour. “Don’t think I’ll be carrying anything for you.

You're the one shopping, I'm just here to torture you."

"Yeah, I can see that," sighed Todoroki, his shoulders dropping despondently. Bakugou probably wasn't doing it on purpose, but he sure felt like he was already being psychologically tortured by the simple fact that he had to stop holding his hand. After one more dejected sigh, Todoroki slowly let go of Bakugou's hand and grabbed the shopping basket with that very same hand, just in case he was tempted to reach out for Bakugou's preferred hand at some point. But soon enough, that sadness turned into a determination to get the shopping done as soon as possible. Todoroki figured that once they were out of the grocery store, he'd be able to hold Bakugou's hand again. *Alright, let's get this done.*

The first section they came across at the grocery store was a mixture of fruits, vegetables and fish. Todoroki knew one of the items in Bakugou's secret list was green onions, but if he went directly towards them, he'd probably raise some suspicions. With that in mind, he first went to get some fruit, which was always nice to have around at home.

I wonder if Bakugou can cut apples in the shape of rabbits, Todoroki thought to himself after noticing some delicious-looking red apples on sale. He had only ever seen that being done in a few manga volumes he had borrowed from his classmates during high school, but since Bakugou was so skilled at using knives, it was highly likely that he could do it too. Such a thought was all he needed to grab a handful of apples, stuff them in a bag and then place them inside the shopping basket. *Apples aren't in the list, so… Is Bakugou going to do something to me because of them?*

Not knowing what he should expect out of his choice in fruits, Todoroki glanced at Bakugou. Much to his surprise, Bakugou didn't say or do anything about this unnecessary item inside the shopping basket. He wasn't even showing a smidge of interest in it, simply glancing at the shopping basket before continuing to pay attention to their surroundings.

I guess I'm not at risk for the time being, concluded Todoroki, moving on to the vegetables. Most of the fresh items currently in their kitchen had been brought from Bakugou's former apartment, which gave him a good idea of what he generally used while cooking. It wasn't in the list either, but Todoroki decided to get a few more potatoes, bean sprouts (as he had quite liked the salad made with them that Bakugou had cooked for their lunch) and carrots before he finally got the green onions. As soon as Todoroki added them to the shopping basket, he immediately glanced at Bakugou. *Okay, let's see what that 'gold star' prize is all about.*

Todoroki silently waited for Bakugou to make his move. He knew he had been observing him this entire time. That meant he had seen the exact moment Todoroki had 'guessed' that item correctly. However, Bakugou remained as unfazed as he had been since they entered the grocery store.

…Huh? I got this one right, didn't I? Why isn't he doing anything? Todoroki wondered in the back of his mind, getting more confused each second that went by without any change to the status quo. *Could it be that the wrong items have nullified the right one? That's something I can imagine Bakugou doing, but still… Hmm… What should I do? Maybe if I 'guess' correctly another item, he'll do something? Or is this wait the whole point? Bakugou never said he'd give me the 'gold stars' right away, so that's another possibility… I should keep going as planned for the time being and see what happens next.*

He would only get told off again if he just stood there doing nothing. That was the last thing Todoroki wanted right now. Even with all of those questions floating in his mind, he resumed shopping and moved to the fish section while visually browsing through the refrigerated shelves.

I know he wants ground pork from the meat section, but he didn't write anything about fish or shellfish, Todoroki mumbled to himself as he planned his next move. He remembered seeing some shrimp and cuts

of fish in the freezer, which made this section a low priority at the moment. Since he was still debating the possibility of wrong guesses nullifying correct ones, Todoroki ultimately decided to leave this section untouched and move on to the next one. That led them to the bakery and the ready meals aisle, which Todoroki passed by without paying much attention to either. *With Bakugou cooking, I won't need these anymore from now on.*

Right afterwards came the shelf-stable cooking ingredients, with row after row of the most diverse items. If Todoroki wanted to find the right things in there, he would need to pay a lot of attention, while also adding in a few misdirecting items to the shopping basket.

I can't live in a house without soba, so that's the first thing I'll grab, Todoroki told himself as he reached out for a package of dried soba noodles. The mere thought of eating soba cooked by Bakugou whetted his appetite, whether it came in a hot or cold dish. *We still have it in stock in the cupboards, but you can never have too much soba around.*

Pfft, as predictable as ever, Bakugou snorted in the back of his mind as he watched the package of dried soba noodles being carefully placed inside the shopping basket. Now that Todoroki was fully focused on the task at hand, it was finally his turn to follow through with his last-minute 'torture game'. It was absolutely ridiculous that soba was the needed distraction, but it was still better than nothing. He strategically placed himself next to Todoroki, on the side where the shopping basket wouldn't get in his way. As expected, Bakugou's movements caught the attention of his 'husband', but by then, it was already too late.

"Ba-" Todoroki planned to ask if there was something wrong or if his 'husband' had something to say about his choice of items, but before he could do so, his mouth was sealed in the most surprising of ways. Yes, the method was exactly what you are thinking right now. Bakugou's soft, sweet lips were pressed against Todoroki's, creating the perfect 'surprise attack' that he would have never seen coming in a million years. This was Bakugou he was dealing with, after all. And they were inside a grocery store, in public.

“Heh, now you know what it’s like to be kissed all of a sudden,” snickered Bakugou, adjusting his face mask so he could cover his smirking lips once again. Only his gleefully mischievous crimson eyes were left in sight as he took a step away from Todoroki and then resumed walking down that aisle, though not before he left some parting words. “Don’t just stand there like an idiot. You’ve only earned one ‘gold star’ so far, which means I still have a looooot of time to continue torturing you, hehehe.”

“.....Eh?” If Todoroki had already been extremely confused, he was now completely flabbergasted. Once his vocal cords moved, his body also regained its mobility, which enabled him to turn his head to gawk as Bakugou leisurely kept walking. *Wait, huh…? So does this mean a kiss is the psychological torture…? Or is it the ‘gold star’? Eh? Which is it?* “B-Bakugou, wait…!”

“Shh! Keep your voice down, or you’re gonna bust our disguises!” admonished Bakugou, his voice as low as it was hissy. He would have liked to add a kick to Todoroki’s shin while telling him off, but that aisle had too many people around for that.

“Oh, sorry,” apologised Todoroki by reflex, promptly lowering his voice to not bother or alert any of the people shopping around them. “Bakugou, that kiss just now… Was that the torture or the ‘gold star’?”

“Isn’t it more than obvious which one it was?” scoffed Bakugou while dismissively rolling his eyes at such a silly question. And since it was a silly question, he considered it to be beneath him to provide a concrete answer to it. This response was all Todoroki was going to get out of him.

“No, it’s not obvious at all,” denied Todoroki right away, his head shaking in tandem with his words. His denseness had nothing to do with his inability to tell which was which this time. Anyone in his

shoes would be as confused as he was right now. To begin with, kissing Bakugou was something he greatly enjoyed. Being kissed by him was and would always be akin to a reward as far as he was concerned. However, the prospect of receiving such a delicious reward could easily be turned into a torturous weapon if it was dangled right in front of him but out of his reach. With that in mind, of course Todoroki couldn't tell if that sudden kiss was meant to be the 'gold star' or one more of Bakugou's torture gimmicks.

"That's a you problem, then," said Bakugou, sparing him not even a single drop of mercy. "Also, are you sure you want to continue walking by this aisle without grabbing anything?"

"Ah…" That question made Todoroki come to a stop. That kiss had, without a doubt, made him forget why they were in the grocery store in the first place. He turned around and looked at the multiple shelves they had just passed by. Todoroki reviewed the shopping list he had memorised, and sure enough, he just nearly overlooked one of them. Thankfully, Bakugou had reminded him of it before they moved on to a different section. "I'll be right back."

"Yeah, yeah," sighed Bakugou, shooing Todoroki away with his hand while he waited in that spot. It went without saying that he kept observing every little thing that his 'husband' did as he browsed through the shelves featuring all sorts of seasonings and sauces. Todoroki seemed to be carefully going through every single bottle in a specific spot of the shelf, which consumed quite a few minutes in total. Once he walked back to Bakugou, he had only one new item in the shopping basket, much to the amusement of the evil genius. *Ah, so that's how it is.*

"I'm done with this section now," announced Todoroki, every now and then glancing at the shopping basket to hint that he sought Bakugou's approval. He had, after all, added one more of the items in the list: soy sauce, the light coloured kind. All according to his newest plan, obviously. *If the kiss is the 'gold star', I should get another one soon. If it's torture, it won't happen until I pile up some more wrong items in the shopping basket. Probably.*

“Is that so? Let’s get going then,” said Bakugou without a shred of care. He turned back around and kept walking in the same direction as earlier, his ‘husband’ following right next to him. “You sure took a while in this aisle.”

“The sunglasses make it hard to read the labels,” explained Todoroki, glancing both left and right to inspect the products on both sides of the aisle. “Plus, I’ve never been to this grocery store. I have no idea where they keep each item.”

“Grocery stores are constantly moving their products around to try to tempt their customers into buying more than they initially intended. Memorising where each item is is a waste of time,” sighed Bakugou, slightly peeved by Todoroki’s blatant lack of common knowledge. It was a good thing he was going out of his way to train him in the arts of grocery shopping, too. Otherwise, he had the feeling he would be constantly receiving phone calls from his bird-brained ‘spouse’ whenever he was in charge of grocery shopping. “Just keep in mind the most basic way of grouping ingredients, and they’ll be easier to find the next time you come here.”

“Okay,” said Todoroki with a small nod of his head. When they reached the end of the aisle, they turned around to the next one, which was a continuation of shelf-stable products, this time in the shape of canned goods and vacuum-sealed glass jars. *Hmm… I don’t think I need anything here. Bakugou had most of these things in the freezer. I should keep them that way instead of buying them canned. This way, I also have some extra time to try to figure out which is which before I grab the next item.*

Every time Todoroki ran his eyes down either side of the aisle, he’d afterwards look Bakugou’s way, wanting to check if something was about to happen again or not. But much to his big disappointment, Bakugou didn’t seem to be plotting his next move yet. Did that mean that the kiss was actually not the ‘gold star’ but the so-called psychological torture? But then again, Bakugou had reassured him

that the ‘gold stars’ were something Todoroki annoyed him with every single day. As the moody tsundere that he was, Bakugou obviously complained every single time Todoroki initiated one more of their kissing sessions. Wouldn’t that mean that the kiss had truly been the ‘gold star’ that Todoroki supposedly annoyed him with all the time?

The more I think about it, the more confused I get…, sighed Todoroki in the back of his mind. Whichever way Bakugou had intended that kiss to go, he had unmistakably succeeded in psychologically torturing him. Not having a concrete explanation was akin to being asked to solve an unsolvable mathematical equation. *Well, if it’s unsolvable, I’d be wasting my time trying to find an answer all on my own. And since I can’t ask Bakugou to go easy on me either, I guess I just have to play along for now. Whether he thinks kissing me is a good way to get back at me or a worthy reward for this childish ‘game’, the most important thing is that I get to be kissed by Bakugou. So in the end, whether I ‘win’ or ‘lose’, I will still get the prize I like the most.*

It wasn’t the perfect solution, but thinking about it that way helped Todoroki sort out the confusing mess inside his brain. Trying to rationalise Bakugou’s irrational evil ploys was too hard a task for a mere mortal. So Todoroki decided to just not do it and instead go with his intuition only. And since his intuition was telling him to keep playing along, that’s what he would do.

Alright, we’re finally in the meat and dairy section, noted Todoroki to his own buttons. This was the area where the real bulk of the true grocery list was located. He quickly found where the ground pork was and added it to the shopping basket. Again, to not raise any suspicions, he decided to also get thinly sliced beef and a carton of eggs. Bakugou would surely be able to come up with numerous delicious dishes with all the extra stuff he was buying, either way. And speaking of which… *Still no reaction from him, huh… Too bad…*

Not wanting to delve too long into his disappointment, Todoroki kept moving through that refrigerated section of the store. The next things to be added to the shopping basket were tofu (another item on the list), pudding and, last but not least, more ice cream from the freezers

to combat the stuffy summer heat.

With this, I have everything that was in Bakugou's shopping list and a few other random things I added just because, concluded Todoroki, quite satisfied with the contents of the now heavy shopping basket. He yet again glanced at Bakugou, trying to read the expression he was keeping half hidden behind the face mask. Unfortunately, Todoroki couldn't really tell what Bakugou was thinking about right now. He had no choice but to express himself through the means of words. "I think I'm done."

"Oh yeah?" said Bakugou as he looked down at the shopping basket to inspect it one final time. He then shrugged his shoulders and added a simple, "Okay."

"Is this okay?" asked Todoroki, just to make sure his 'husband' approved of this selection.

"Yeah," replied Bakugou with another dismissive shrug.

"Are you sure?" asked Todoroki one more time, giving Bakugou one last chance to announce he had won a few more 'gold stars', whatever they truly were. "Why don't you check the shopping list you wrote down? This way, we won't accidentally forget anything you need for tonight's dinner."

"I was the one who created the list. I know very well what's in there," grumbled Bakugou, his eyebrows scrunching into a frown.

"....."

“Don’t give me the ‘go check it just in case’ silent stare!” hissed Bakugou, trying his best to keep the volume of his voice down. “I know very well what’s written in the list, and I’ve said we’re good. So that means it’s time to go to the checkout! Got it?”

“Where are the remaining ‘gold stars’ then?” asked Todoroki, head slightly tilted to the left. “You said earlier I’d only gotten one back then. But your list had multiple items in it. Since you just confirmed we’re good to go, that must mean they’re all in the shopping basket, right? So where are my ‘gold stars’?”

“Ugh… G-Greedy much!?” grumbled Bakugou, stumbling a bit over his words due to Todoroki’s straightforward claim to his rewards. “I never said you were going to receive the ‘gold stars’ right away, did I? I can give them to you whenever I feel like it!”

“But I want them now,” demanded Todoroki, even though he was fully aware of how selfish and unreasonable he was being. They were, after all, in a public place. If those ‘gold stars’ were in fact the kiss, their PG public displays of affection would quickly escalate into NSFW territory. *Even so, I want to make sure Bakugou doesn’t-*

“Oh yeah? Well, you should have thought about that before you cheated!” Bakugou retorted, now that he had overcome the initial wave of flusteredness that Todoroki’s direct words had caused inside his chest. “Cheaters don’t get any rewards from me!”

-go back on his wor- Wait, what? Stupefied by what he (and a few passersby) had just heard, Todoroki’s body froze in place from head to toes. How on earth had Bakugou figured that out? Did he have any proof of it? No, he couldn’t have, as Todoroki had made sure to throw away any incriminating evidence. Bakugou was probably just trying to find his way out of this predicament, now that Todoroki had cornered him. As such, all Todoroki could do was try to bluff and lie himself into a through-and-through victory. “W-What makes you think I’ve cheated?”

“Oh, c’mon! Don’t even try to use your shitty lying skills against me,” groaned Bakugou with an annoyed roll of his eyes. He grabbed the bottle of soy sauce from the shopping basket and pointed at it. “Why did you get this?”

“I figured having a nice stock of soy sauce at home would be nice?” explained Todoroki, even though his own words sounded a bit uncertain.

“No, why did you get this bottle specifically?” asked Bakugou anew, his crimson eyes tightening into a suspicious glare.

“I just grabbed the first bottle I saw?” said Todoroki, the palms of his hands starting to get slightly sweaty from the pure antagonistic pressure his ‘husband’ was exuding during this makeshift interrogation.

“Liar! You took longer than usual when picking the soy sauce!” Bakugou pointed out, easily seeing through Todoroki’s crappy lies. “You even complained that it was hard to read the labels because of the sunglasses!”

…Damn it, he had already caught me back then… Bakugou Katsuki was truly a hard and extremely smart opponent. At this point, all Todoroki could do was admit his defeat. He sighed, “Alright… Yeah, I cheated. But I only did it because I wanted the rest of the day to go smoothly. Plus, I didn’t want to accidentally ruin dinner…”

“Yeah, yeah. Keep the excuses to yourself,” groaned Bakugou with one final roll of his eyes. “This way, you won’t accuse me of tricking you or anything along those lines. Now let’s get going, or I won’t have time to cook dinner to begin with!”

“How did you even figure out I was cheating?” asked Todoroki as he followed Bakugou to the closest checkout point. The queue was manageable, so they would be out of the grocery store and looking for the right size of bed sheets fairly quickly.

“Heh, isn’t it obvious?” snickered Bakugou, stuffing his hand inside his hoodie’s pocket. From there, he pulled out a neatly folded piece of paper - the shopping list in question. “I obviously made sure I’d be able to catch you if you cheated. So I added a little trap while writing the shopping list.”

“So, in other words, you tricked me again,” deadpanned Todoroki as he grabbed the folded piece of paper Bakugou was motioning towards him. He opened the paper and read the shopping list anew. Soon after, Todoroki was once again tilting his head in confusion. “Huh? But this isn’t the same…?”

“Nope, it’s the same list you saw me writing in the kitchen,” reassured Bakugou, his crimson eyes gleefully sparkling at one more successful, indisputable victory. “Did you really think I’d randomly leave the notepad on the counter like that? I was obviously nudging you into cheating in a way I could control. If you weren’t going to cheat, that would be that. But in case you did, I’d rather you do it in a way that is easy to figure out. Like, for example, using the piece of paper underneath the one I wrote on to read the shopping list in secret. The pressure on the pen’s nib always leaves some evidence on the page below, right? So I made sure to write the real list as normal, but then closed the pen while scribbling ‘light coloured’ in front of the soy sauce without any ink. That way, it would get imprinted on the page below without actually being written down on the real shopping list. All in all, if you hadn’t cheated, you wouldn’t have gotten tricked by me yet again and lost the remaining ‘gold stars’ you could have otherwise earned if you had simply tried your best.”

“You’ve gotten way too good at manipulating other people. It’s no wonder you’re so sought after by villains,” sighed Todoroki, yet again

raising the white flag and admitting his defeat.

"Hmph! You shouldn't have underestimated my skills at it yesterday," scoffed Bakugou with a dismissive shrug. "Now you're getting your just deserts."

"You're still sulking about that?" chuckled Todoroki, unable to resist the amusing charm of a childishly vindictive Bakugou. "What would you have done if I hadn't cheated and still guessed most, if not all, of the items in the shopping list? Would you have kissed me for each correct item?"

"Who knows?" replied Bakugou, once again offering a non-answer as his answer. The way he averted Todoroki's gaze and turned his head in the opposite direction was a dead giveaway for what his actual answer was, however.

He's so not honest… But that's part of what makes him so cute, I guess, chuckled Todoroki, this time to himself only. He carefully inched closer to Bakugou without surrendering his spot in the queue and wrapped his free arm around his slender waist, pulling him even closer in the process. Thanks to that shortened distance, Todoroki could easily whisper in Bakugou's ear. "Next time, it'll be my turn to write a list of what I'd like you to cook for me. And I'll be sure to kiss you lots and lots too, as a reward."

"Y-You really are too damn greedy…" Bakugou grumbled under his breath, immediately adjusting the hoodie over his head so it would cover his bright red ears more snugly.

Had it been just the two of them there, Bakugou would have stuffed his elbow on Todoroki's gut, as per usual. But since they were out in public and in disguise… Well, he couldn't exactly start a commotion by hitting his companion, now could he?

Chapter 44

Chapter Notes

Hello, everyone! I hope you're all doing well!

After having to put my entire life on hold for over half a decade due to my health issues, I can finally say I'm at a point where I can resume everything I had to pause. This Friday I'll be moving back abroad to continue my studies, yay!
I still don't know how that will affect my fics and their release schedule. I want to keep our beloved TodoBaku Mondays as they are, so I will try my best to keep them going for as long as I can, but I also don't know how my class schedule will cut into the hours I'm used to pouring into my writing.
But worry not, if there are any changes to anything, I'll be sure to let you all know!

I hope you also have a great week and enjoy this chapter!

“We’re finally back home…” tiredly sighed Bakugou as he made his way inside the entrance area of the apartment. He put the plastic shopping bag he was carrying on the wooden floor to take off the face mask and put on his slippers completely unimpeded.

“Home, huh…” repeated Todoroki, lightly chuckling at the unexpected words that had come out of Bakugou’s mouth. This was their first official day living at the new apartment, and yet his ‘husband’ was already calling it ‘home’? Whether it had been heartfelt or misspoken, that single word had gotten Todoroki all enthusiastic once again. He hurried up to follow after Bakugou while carrying the remaining shopping bags. “Where do you want me to put these?”

“I can store away the groceries on my own just fine,” said Bakugou, taking one of the shopping bags from Todoroki’s hand before he settled them both on top of the kitchen counter. “You go take care of your bed first and foremost. Come back to the kitchen once you’re done.”

“Okay?” acknowledged Todoroki with a bit of an uncertain tone. If Bakugou was going to take care of the groceries on his own, what exactly would he need him to do in the kitchen? Todoroki took off the cap and sunglasses he had borrowed from Bakugou, placed them on top of the counter too, and then obediently went to his bedroom while holding that question in the back of his mind. The fastest way to figure that one out would be to complete the first set of instructions he had received.

Todoroki had always had a preference for futons over beds, as that was what he grew up using. But the apartments he had lived in since officially moving out of both the dorm and his parents’ house had always had a more Western build, with no tatami mats in sight. That forced him to make a sudden change into a bed, which he wasn’t fully accustomed to just yet. In other words, he wasn’t exactly the most proficient bed maker…

The first step - taking the new bedsheets out of the plastic packaging - was the easiest part of the whole process. Bakugou had advised him to get fitted bedsheets that matched the mattress size to a T, as they would be more beginner-friendly. The fact that Bakugou had correctly guessed he also wasn’t that good at making the bed was impressive in its own right, Todoroki had to admit. However, he had to disagree on one thing: fitted bedsheets weren’t as beginner-friendly as he had been told.

“Huh?” Soon after Todoroki had clumsily placed the fitted corners on the corresponding corners of the mattress and was working on the last corner, the bedsheet slipped out of the opposite corner. Todoroki tilted his head, mystified by what had just happened. “Did I place that one wrong?”

Once he was done with the corner he had been working on, Todoroki moved back to the upper right corner once again, pulling and adjusting the bedsheet until it was neatly stretched. However, before he could get to that corner, one more fitted corner slipped out, this time from the bottom right corner.

“Eh?” gasped Todoroki, now at two corners in, two corners out. He silently stared at the half-exposed mattress for a couple of seconds, trying to figure out what exactly was going wrong. He had never had this type of problem when making his bed with regular bedsheets in the past - albeit the bottom ones did come loose from underneath the mattress after a full night of sleep. “Maybe that means I can’t go about it like before… Okay, let’s try a different approach.”

Since the corners of the bedsheet were so prone to slipping, Todoroki figured he’d just need to hold them in place until all four corners were where they should be. The problem was that this bed was twice as big as his old one, designed for two people to sleep comfortably. Todoroki was tall and had long limbs, but it would still be one heck of a challenge.

However, Todoroki wasn’t one to give up without at least giving it a shot. He walked around the bed to the other side, which still had all corners in the right position. He grabbed the upper left corner and then stretched himself and the bedsheet towards the right corner. With some awkward tugging and pulling, Todoroki somehow managed to get the right upper corner in place.

“Okay, one le- Oh.” Just as Todoroki was sighing over that small victory, he felt the fabric underneath him getting looser than it had been a few seconds ago. When he glanced at the bottom of the bed, lo and behold, the left bottom corner had slipped from underneath the mattress, leaving him once again in the two corners in, two corners out stage. Todoroki was rendered completely speechless at that sight. “……”

Could it be that since the bed was meant for two people, the bed-making also required two sets of hands? If one person worked on the top and another on the bottom, the bedsheet that went over the mattress would definitely stay in place, wouldn’t it? But on the other hand, Bakugou had left him in charge of this task all on his own. That had to mean it was possible to do it alone, right?

“Hey, what’s keeping you in there for so long?” As Todoroki was trying to once again come up with a new strategy, Bakugou’s voice came from outside the bedroom’s open door. Soon, Bakugou himself was peeking inside the room to get the most accurate answer possible to his question. “...The hell are you doing?”

“Um, making the bed like you told me to?” answered Todoroki, still stuck holding the upper corners in place with his outstretched arms. For that, he had to get himself half on top of the bed, tiptoeing on the floor with just one of his feet.

“That’s the most moronic way of making a bed ever,” Bakugou retorted right back, arms crossed over his chest as he watched that pitiful stance from the doorway. “Why the heck are you holding the bedsheet like that?”

“The corners keep slipping out,” explained Todoroki, briefly glancing at the undone bottom corners to exemplify his current plight.

“Yeah, so why aren’t you using the sheet fasteners?” asked Bakugou, getting slightly peeved at having to spell out the obvious.

“Sheet… fasteners?” repeated Todoroki, head tilted as he enunciated that foreign word.

“Oh, for fuck’s sake,” groaned Bakugou, rolling his eyes so far back that he nearly got a small peep of his own brain. He turned around and went back to the corridor, moving from one bedroom to the other. When he returned, he came back with the so-called ‘sheet fasteners’, which he threw on top of the half-exposed mattress. “Here, use these to keep the bedsheet in place, you utter disaster of a grown man.”

“Oh. Thanks,” said Todoroki, immediately letting go of both upper corners of the bedsheet and getting back up. As soon as he removed himself from on top of the bed, those two corners of the bedsheet popped right off with hilarious timing.

“Pfft!” snorted Bakugou, his exasperated bad mood softening slightly. He was usually annoyed with other people’s incompetence, but Todoroki was clumsy in a way that prevented others from staying mad for too long. “I can tell you’ve never had to deal with this type until now. No wonder your bed was always so messy in the morning. C’mon, help me lift the mattress.”

“I don’t think the past two nights’ messiness had anything to do with the type of bedsheets I have,” deadpanned Todoroki, only half in agreement with Bakugou’s statement. Sure, his bedsheets were always looser and with parts of the fabric slipping out from underneath the mattress after a night of sleep. But nothing compared to the past couple of nights. That had been entirely caused by the vigorous movements they had performed on top of the bed. Obviously, Todoroki couldn’t say that out loud, or he’d turn their conversation into a hissy argument. Following Bakugou’s instructions, they lifted one side of the mattress until it was at a diagonal angle in relation to the bed frame.

“Yeah, right. Come tell me that one once again after you’ve actually tried them out the right way,” Bakugou retorted with a dismissive tone. He was the master of messy bedsheets due to his messy sleeping posture, so he would know how well the sheet fasteners he used worked on this type of bedsheet. With a small jerk of his chin, Bakugou told him to go to the other side of the bed to pass him one side of the bedsheet.

“Okay,” acknowledged Todoroki with a nod of his head, once again doing as he had been instructed. He picked up the bedsheet as it was slowly slipping towards the floor, calmly turning it round and round until he found the right side. Todoroki then threw that side of the sheets towards Bakugou, who readily grabbed it and started adjusting the upper corner. “How do you put the sheet, um, fasteners on?”

“That’s where we need to start?” sighed Bakugou, somehow controlling the urge to facepalm himself. He really had his work cut out for him if this was the level his ‘husband’ was currently at.

And so, yet another lengthy 101 lesson was started, this time on how to make a bed the right and fast way solo. Luckily for Bakugou, Todoroki wasn’t that bad of a student, albeit it took him a while to figure out how to do a delicate task with his stupidly strong and clumsy hands. After a quick explanation and a visual demonstration, Todoroki managed to level up from a badly placed bedsheet to a crisp, wrinkle-free one. The rest of the bed-making came more easily to him - it was summer, so just a light bedsheet and a thin comforter were more than enough. Those only needed to be laid down over the bottom bedsheet; an easy task that even a clumsy man could do without further instructions. The last step was the pillows, placed against the bed’s headboard for the time being.

“See? It’s not that hard when you do it the right way, is it?” scoffed Bakugou, indirectly praising Todoroki for a job well done. If he kept this up and learned the easier tasks this fast, Bakugou would have no issues proving his point within the deadline Enji had set.

“If I were still sleeping in a futon, I wouldn’t have had this issue to begin with,” Todoroki pointed out, giving one final glance at his perfectly made bed. For all the positives and pros a futon had, however, he was willing to admit that a bed like this one wasn’t all that bad either. Todoroki did have plenty of new reasons to prefer it over a traditional futon at the moment, after all.

“Yeah, yeah. Just don’t forget that learning new stuff and getting new experiences will help out with your side of our ‘mission’. So don’t you start getting lazy or getting too accustomed to having me around to fix your problems all the time, alright?” added Bakugou, needing to add some rebukes to his praise. He couldn’t continue giving just the ‘carrot’ to his ‘husband’; the ‘stick’ needed to be deployed even more frequently to not get him too reliant on him by accident. “Now that

this is done, it's time we finally get dinner ready."

"Oh, before you do that," interjected Todoroki, taking a side step to prevent Bakugou from going back to the kitchen. "There's one last thing I need to know about the bed."

"What now?" grumbled Bakugou, his crimson eyes narrowing as he suspiciously looked right back at Todoroki - all the more so when he started walking towards him, which forced Bakugou to also walk backwards to keep a safe distance between them.

"Are you sure those sheet fasteners will really hold out? You've never used them in a bed of this size, right?" asked Todoroki, briefly glancing at the bed Bakugou was about to bump into. "I say we should test it out."

"You sure sound like you want to go to bed on an empty stomach," warned Bakugou, sitting down on the bed as soon as the back of his legs crashed onto it.

"Can't we do both?" suggested Todoroki as he leaned his upper body closer to Bakugou's now lower height. "You called me greedy so many times today that I'm really starting to feel like I can be as selfish as I want."

"Heh, you don't say?" snickered Bakugou, the corner of his lips slowly stretching into a knowing smirk. "Fine by me. Just don't complain about it afterwards."

"Why would I complain?" asked Todoroki, slightly confused about that last remark. If he was going to get what he wanted, he couldn't see why he would complain about it after the fact.

“Let’s just say the testing out is about to ruin all of your hard work,” said Bakugou while pointing with his thumb to behind his back - more specifically, to the pristine bed.

Just like intended, his words got Todoroki to make his next move. And just like intended, Bakugou grabbed him by the cheeks with his hand just as he was about to kiss him.

“What are you doing? Didn’t you want to test if the sheet fasteners can hold out in this bed?” asked Bakugou, the mocking tone of his voice accentuating the smirk on his lips even more. He adjusted his sitting position while continuing to hold Todoroki’s face, pulling himself further into the bed. From there, it was easier to lift his feet from the floor and place them on the edge of the bed, which he used as a springboard to get up on top of it. Only then did Bakugou let go of Todoroki’s face and walk up to the middle of the bed. Without any warning, he started hopping up and down on the bed, much to Todoroki’s dismay. “See? They can hold out just fine. And so can the bed, by the looks of it. Hehehehe!”

I should add the ‘just don’t complain later’ phrase to the list of signs he’s up to no good, deadpanned Todoroki in the back of his mind, his shoulders dropping in disappointment. Jumping on the bed like a little kid was not the type of testing that Todoroki had been suggesting. However, Bakugou had flawlessly turned it against him in a matter of seconds. All he could do was sigh while biding his time.

“Welp, I’m gonna get dinner started for real now,” leisurely said Bakugou as he jumped out of the bed. He patted Todoroki’s shoulder while on his way to the door. “Get the bedsheets straightened out before you come to the kitchen, yeah?”

“Okay…” mumbled Todoroki with a sulky voice, not all that happy to redo a portion of the bedding because of a reason as silly as this one.

Heh, he's got another thing coming if he thinks I'll let him jump me as easily as the previous times, snorted Bakugou in the back of his mind, quite satisfied with himself and the result of his little 'tricks'. Not to mention, he had the feeling he really wouldn't be able to get up from bed for a good while if they were to have sex for the third night in a row… Not that that was the main reason why he was circumventing Todoroki's 'invitations' and 'suggestions' or any such thing! First and foremost was his inherent desire to not fall for his seductive ploys ever again! *Hmph! That greedy pervert is getting too ahead of himself, claiming to have the capability to get me addicted to having sex with him just because there's this small, tiny, minuscule, nanoscopic, little possibility of it happening. Unlike him, I'm not dumb enough to play with fire like that!*

Just because Bakugou had admitted it could happen didn't mean he would put himself in a position that more easily enabled it. Yes, they were married. Yes, they weren't doing anything wrong or bad. Yes, the physical intimacy made it easier to look like a legit couple in the eyes of those who were unaware of their 'unofficial mission'. However, Bakugou still thought that muddying the waters too much was a bad idea. They were only doing this to achieve their own goals, so it would be for the better if they didn't let any of it interfere too much with their own personal lives.

Or so Bakugou wanted to continue thinking…

Tsk, I feel like I'm continuously going back and forth with the same talking points…, grumbled Bakugou to his own buttons as he gathered the necessary ingredients to make the main and side dishes for their dinner. *And it's all because Half-and-Half Bastard is so damn persuasive whenever he gets in that annoying one-track-mind mode of his! Argh, now I'm doing exactly what he told me to do and putting all the blame on him! He* is *the one at fault here, for the most part, but I also hate following his suggestions! Damn it, talk about cutting off your nose to spite your face! On the day we conclude this whole operation, I swear I'm gonna clock him so hard in the face that I'll wipe all memories of this whole thing from his brain! No, crap, if I do that, I'll also wipe away all the independent living skills he learned throughout our fake marriage, which would mean we'd*

have to start his side of the mission all over again… Damn it, he really got me good this time…

The best option Bakugou had ahead of him was to simply not fall for Todoroki's sweet nothings and caresses ever again, but that was honestly easier said than done. Plus, it wasn't as if he'd be able to come up with new, original ways to avoid being seduced all the time. Todoroki was dense but not stupid, which meant he'd eventually get used to his little tricks and manipulative plans to the point they wouldn't work on him any longer. Not to mention…

Whenever he starts that whole conversation about should's and could's and whatnot, it's like I can't bring myself to give him a clear, absolute no, for some reason…, mumbled Bakugou in the back of his mind, his cheekbones suffering a spontaneous and quite acute spike in temperature - though the cause for that had to be related to the fact he was moving around the kitchen so much to get the prep work done rather than what he was thinking about. *It's not like I meant for any of that to happen just because I kissed him to fool his father at that key moment. I didn't want to sleep with him or anything… No, I did want to do it when we did it, but that doesn't mean I…… Tsk, the more I think about it, the less sense it makes, so I'm just going to NOT think about it anymore! If I don't recognise it as a problem, then there's no problem at all, is there!? Well, there you go, problem-that-I-will-keep-convincing-myself-that-does-not-exist solved!*

"Bakugou."

"Wah! Stop sneaking up on me like that, damn it!" yelped Bakugou, his whole body startling at the sudden calling of his name. He promptly turned his head and glared daggers at Todoroki.

"I wasn't. I just came to the kitchen like you asked me to," pointed out Todoroki, an eyebrow slightly arched at the uncharacteristic reaction Bakugou had gotten at his appearance. It wasn't every day one could scare pro hero Dynamight like that… "Do you need my help with

anything?”

“Hell no, I can cook dinner on my own, thank you very much,” scoffed Bakugou, immediately rejecting that aggravating offer. “I want you to do like last night and watch in silence without getting in my way. Maybe watching someone cooking properly will serve as a good example for any of your future cooking adventures. If you cook something for your father that doesn’t look like dog food, he might be convinced to scratch off the ‘needs to be good at cooking’ from the ideal bride’s requirements.”

“Oh. Okay,” said Todoroki, slightly surprised by this unusual request. Since Bakugou had been claiming the kitchen as his right from the start of this ‘mission’, Todoroki thought he wouldn’t be allowed in it at all. Bakugou was a very territorial man, after all. That’s why this sudden ‘stay here and watch’ order was so shocking, but also quite welcome. *Well, if he wants me here in the kitchen like yesterday, that’s not that big or bad of a request. I actually quite like it.*

Without thinking anything else about it, Todoroki proceeded with granting Bakugou’s wish… by hugging him from behind and leaning his chin on his shoulder.

“W-What the hell are you doing!?” yelled Bakugou, his voice cracking a little bit due to the suddenness of it all. “I told you not to get in my way, didn’t I!?”

“Yeah, but you also told me to do it like last night, right?” Todoroki remarked as he nestled more closely against Bakugou’s back in search of a more comfortable position throughout the incoming tantrum. “This is how we did it yesterday. So that's also what I’ll do today.”

“That’s not what I meant, and you know it!” hissed Bakugou, moving his shoulders up and down to shake off the annoying limpet now stuck

to him. Todoroki, however, didn't budge a single inch and silently insisted on claiming that spot for himself. All Bakugou could do against that was to click his tongue and curse. "Tsk! Sometimes I seriously can't tell if you're doing this crap on purpose or if you're that fuckin' dense!"

"Who knows?" replied Todoroki, using the same tone and phrase his 'husband' was so well known for. He had to deploy some hardcore self-control when he saw Bakugou grumbling under his breath, but otherwise doing nothing more to truly shake him off. If he had not, he definitely would have hugged him even tighter and squeezed out a few more complaints from him.

The grumbling and cussing lasted a few more minutes, but eventually faded into a comfortable silence as Bakugou shifted most of his focus back to the cooking. There was nothing he could do about Todoroki, so he'd rather not waste his time fighting about it. Picking his battles wisely had always been his ultimate counter against the selfish and unreasonable actions of others. Plus, if Todoroki maintained the same usefulness of the previous night, then he wouldn't get in the way all that much - which meant he had no reason to complain and kick him out of there, much to Bakugou's chagrin.

As such, with loads and loads of patience and a hungry stomach, Bakugou managed to overcome the desire to lock Todoroki in the balcony with no food until the following morning and instead vented his annoyance with the cooking. It was a good thing that he had gathered all the ingredients he'd need to make dinner, as that diminished how much he had to move around in the kitchen. He was able to stay in the same spot at the counter as he mixed the ingredients for the sauce, and cut vegetables and tofu into different sizes and shapes. He had also gotten the rice cooking before he went to check why Todoroki was taking so long making the bed, so it would get done more or less at the same time as the remaining dishes. All of these small but consistent steps made the dinner preparations move swiftly and without further issues or disagreements.

"Oh. You're making Fuyu-nee's mapo tofu," interjected Todoroki all of

a sudden, his brain finally connecting the dots between what they had bought at the grocery store and what Bakugou was doing. “I didn’t think you’d make it this soon into our apartment share.”

“Talking about it made me feel like eating it, that’s all,” said Bakugou with a small shrug. He could already tell what Todoroki was going to say next, so he spoke first. “Yes, it’s the same recipe. No changes whatsoever. You won’t die from me making it too spicy.”

“I’ve been eyeing that red sauce right from the start, so I was actually relieved when I figured out what you’re cooking,” admitted Todoroki as he heaved a small sigh of relief in the back of his mind. Perhaps because he had never seen his sister cooking mapo tofu, he had no idea the spicy sauce was so in-your-face red before it was added to the minced pork and tofu.

“Heh, can’t say I’m surprised about that one,” scoffed Bakugou, a small mischievous smirk already starting to peek out of his lips. “I did threaten to amp up the spiciness level of basically anything. It truly is a pity I can’t put you in the hospital or in an early grave.”

“Your sarcastic remarks are still as mean and scary as usual,” deadpanned Todoroki, fully aware that Bakugou hadn’t actually meant what he said. Had he meant it, he wouldn’t have said it out loud - he’d simply do it.

“Gotta keep my image of being a bully. Otherwise, you morons start getting too ahead of yourselves and taking a whole mile when I’m just giving you an inch,” snickered Bakugou, very much proud of what he was admitting to. “I sure can’t wait for the next time I see Dunce Face in person. He fucked around to his heart’s content. Now he’s gonna find out in equal proportion.”

“You’re complaining now, but having those around actually ended up

being a lifesaver," pointed out Todoroki, chuckling just a little bit at Bakugou's vengeful proclamation. "You could barely walk last night. That would have been so much worse without the right tools."

"Or maybe I'd be walking just fine since your pervy brain wouldn't have been sprouting those sorts of ideas," grumbled Bakugou, hitting the top of Todoroki's head with the wooden spoon he was about to use to cook the mapo tofu's ingredients.

"No, I only got those sorts of ideas because you were being so le- I mean, hot," Todoroki said in his own defence. "Kaminari gifting us condoms and lube ended up being a happy coincidence, going by what you were saying back then. Besides……"

"Besides, what…?" repeated Bakugou, sideways glaring at Todoroki as a warning about whatever it was he was going to say.

"No, never mind. It's nothing," backtracked Todoroki, picking the safe option by keeping his mouth shut. That was usually the best thing anyone could do in this sort of circumstance. It *was* what worked the best on Bakugou and prevented him from going ballistic on someone else. But not this time.

"Besides, what?" asked Bakugou again, his voice much more stern this time around. "Go on, keep on babbling like usual. Let's see how big a hole you'll have to dig this time."

"I wasn't going to say anything that bad," deadpanned Todoroki, even though he was somewhat averting Bakugou's gaze.

"If that's the case, then just go ahead and say it," pressed Bakugou without missing a beat. He wasn't going to let Todoroki off the hook this time around, since he was so dead set on shooting himself in the

foot. It only took a couple of seconds for his 'husband' to start faltering under the silent pressure and admit his surrender with a small sigh.

"...I wasn't exactly planning on going all the way with you on that first night…" confessed Todoroki with one more sigh. Simply remembering the outcome of what had started as just kissing got his body feeling all restless. His arms inadvertently tightened some more around Bakugou's body at the same time Todoroki buried his face on his shoulder. "But then with you reacting and looking like that… right before admitting you can't come unless you do that sort of thing… Yeah, that had nothing to do with Kaminari's gift and everything to do with you."

"Ngh… A-Aren't you ashamed of saying something so… so…" stammered Bakugou, his whole face bursting into a fiery red blush. He couldn't help but bonk Todoroki's head with the wooden spoon a couple more times; both to distract himself from the fact that his heartbeat had accelerated so suddenly and to vent his frustration over Todoroki's blunt honesty. "Argh, why are we even talking about this in the first place!? Just shut up and let me cook in peace and quiet!"

"You were the one who made me say it out loud…" mumbled Todoroki, tentatively lifting his head from Bakugou's shoulder. The moment he got a glimpse of Bakugou's face and how red it was, he was overwhelmed with the desire to drag him back to his bedroom and get their new bed all messy all over again. It took everything in him not to do exactly that. What helped him keep that fiery desire under control was the fact that Bakugou had already turned on the stove to get something cooking - miso soup, by the looks of it. Todoroki slowly leaned his chin on Bakugou's shoulder once again while he took a deep breath and exhaled. *This is so not fair… His reactions are way too cute and attractive. I wanna kiss him so badly… And touch him… And…… Yeah, this really is so not fair.*

Thanks to Todoroki leaving his sulking as just an internal monologue, Bakugou got what he had asked for: a peaceful cooking session. Once he got the miso soup on the stove, it was a race against time all the

way up to the finish line. But as the phenomenal genius that he was, he got one dish completed after another, with the mapo tofu coming in first place, followed by the miso soup, the rice and, last but not least, a daikon and carrot salad that was ready in less than 2 minutes thanks to his superb knife skills.

“Make yourself useful and go grab me some plates and bowls,” requested Bakugou, pointing at the cupboard where they were located with the chopsticks he had been using to stir the mapo tofu. “One large plate, one small plate, and two bowls for each of us, to be more specific.”

“Got it,” acknowledged Todoroki, at long last unglueing himself from Bakugou’s body to do as he was being told. He carefully grabbed all the dishware he had been asked for, plus an additional two pairs of chopsticks, and placed them on the kitchen counter next to Bakugou.

Much like it had gone for the cooking, Bakugou neatly plated all the dishes with portions that would keep them full until the following morning. As he did so, Todoroki carried them to the dining table, his mouth already watering at the fragrant aroma of the food. Thanks to the teamwork, he didn’t have to wait for too long to sit at the table with a delicious meal spread in front of him.

“I thought as much when we were eating the bento boxes you made for our lunch, but you really know how to serve food,” commented Todoroki after giving Bakugou his thanks for the food. “This looks more like it came out of a restaurant’s kitchen rather than a home-cooked meal.”

“The eyes eat as much as the mouth does,” said Bakugou with a shrug right before he popped some of the spicy mapo tofu into his mouth. “Why would I go out of my way to make food look like your home-cooked dog food? Oh, wait, that was curry, wasn’t it?”

“I shouldn’t have shown you that photo…” grumbled Todoroki, his expressionless demeanour doing a great job at hiding his pouting.

“Nah, that was a huge help. Now I know what to expect out of your cooking skills,” snorted Bakugou, his words sounding supportive but the tone of his voice hinting that he was being partially sarcastic right now. “What else have you cooked so far?”

“Well, I can make rice in the rice cooker just fine. I’ve also gotten the hang of cooking soba noodles,” said Todoroki, thinking about his cooking repertoire in between bites of his dinner. “Fuyu-nee has tried to teach me how to make some simple dishes, like tamagoyaki and salted salmon. Oh, also miso soup, hamburger steaks and the sunny side up eggs I made for your breakfast yesterday.”

“And how did that go?” asked Bakugou, even though he had a feeling he already knew the answer to this one.

“The tamagoyaki ended up looking like scrambled eggs,” deadpanned Todoroki, halting his chopsticks as he relayed all the dishes he had slaughtered up until now. “The salted salmon and hamburger steaks had one side completely charred. I also accidentally burned the miso soup by adding the miso paste too soon, according to what my mother told me afterwards. And the sunny side up eggs… Yeah, I think you already know how those went.”

“Yeah, figured as much,” sighed Bakugou, his expectations fully met by this disastrous retelling.

“I did try my best when I was making them,” insisted Todoroki, not wanting to give the impression that he had failed on purpose or because he couldn’t be bothered. “To be honest, I’d like to know how to cook on my own. I might not be on board with my father’s methods, but I do agree that I should be able to feed myself without

the help of my mother and sister or without resorting to eating out every day. It's not sustainable long term, as he keeps saying."

"So what's stopping you? If you wanna learn how to cook, then just learn," said Bakugou, offering a small shrug to show how truly simple that was. "It's not like it's rocket science. So long as you follow the recipe, anyone can cook… or so I'd usually say, but with you? Yeah, it might as well be rocket science for your clumsy, destructive hands."

"Yeah," acknowledged Todoroki with a small nod of his head. To fix a problem, one needed to first accept that there was a problem to begin with. Todoroki had long been aware that he wasn't all that good at using his hands and that he had a propensity to break things with them (he hadn't called himself the 'Hand Crusher' while in high school for no reason). He had even struggled with the right power output with his Quirk at one point. "I know it's just a matter of practice and hands-on experience, just like how I mastered both the ice and the fire sides of my Quirk. But it's kinda hard to practice cooking when I don't spend all that much time at home. Plus, it wasn't as if I could ask Fuyu-nee or Mom to always be around when I'm off from work. They also have their own lives and work to take care of."

"Heh, practice and hands-on experience, you say?" snorted Bakugou, one of his eyebrows slightly arched due to the convenient direction this conversation was taking. For as dense as he might be on the daily, at least Todoroki was pretty good at determining the level he was currently at in several different metrics. "Letting you cook in my kitchen as you are right now would be a huge gamble. I'm not about to let you set fire to my things by accident. Like I told you earlier, just keep watching how I cook for the time being. That should at least guide you somewhat the next time you try it on your own."

"You want me to learn how to cook by observation?" asked Todoroki, his head quizzically tilted to the left. "Wouldn't it be better if I practised one skill at a time and moved on from there bit by bit?"

“Only if you want to eat the same stuff for days on end,” pointed out Bakugou, nudging the rice on his bowl around so he could pick it up with his chopsticks. “This isn’t a cooking school or a restaurant. You don’t have the luxury of practising one thing only until you get the hang of it. Besides, it’s not like you need to reach the same god-tier level as me. So long as it’s edible and can prove to your father you won’t starve yourself to death without an ‘ideal bride’ around, it should be fine.”

“Hmm… I guess you have a point there,” said Todoroki, thinking a bit more deeply about the new direction Bakugou was pushing him towards. The only reason why he had gotten some solid skills at cooking both rice and soba noodles was that he had cooked them so many times since he started living in the dorm during high school. At first, he messed those up quite frequently. But since using the rice cooker at the dorm and cooking his favourite food were essential tasks in his daily life, he slowly got better and better at it. If he were to use that same strategy to improve his cooking skills overall, it would take him more than a decade to learn how to make a complete meal. Taking all of that into consideration, he had to agree that there might be a method to Bakugou’s madness. “If you think that would work on me, I can give it a shot. Since we’re going to try to match our schedules as much as possible, we’ll be at home at the same time most days.”

“So long as you can convince your daddy dearest to let you control your own schedule from now on, that is,” added Bakugou, already getting a bad feeling about that very important factor for the success of their mission. They wouldn’t be able to work on both sides of their deal unless they teamed up for the majority of the time. “I’m almost 100% sure he’ll screw you over if you tell him it’s because of me.”

“I’m ready to go on strike if he doesn’t let me follow through with that,” deadpanned Todoroki, even though there was a fiery seriousness in his heterochromatic eyes. “He’s only at the hero agency to make his transition into full-time retirement as smooth as possible. At this point, all he does is paperwork. I’m sure no one at the hero agency will complain if I were to take one more task off his hands.”

“Yikes, backstabbed by his own son again, huh?” snickered Bakugou, liking quite a lot what he was hearing. Since Todoroki was usually such a goodie-two-shoes when it came to both his family and job, Bakugou would have never guessed he’d be this willing to take some more extreme measures. It seemed he was also taking their unofficial mission very seriously, in his own way. “Well, if he starts kicking up a fuss about it, just call your mother right in front of him again. That should get him to pass over his scheduling duties to his oh-so-precious heir completely.”

“That would make him even more mad at you, though?” pointed out Todoroki as he chuckled at Bakugou’s suggestion. Usually, discussions about his father always annoyed him to a certain degree, especially when related to Enji’s relationship with Bakugou. But right now, his dinner was so delicious, and his companion so enjoyable to have around, that his emotions were incapable of switching to anger.

“As if I’m scared of that grumpy old fart being mad at me,” scoffed Bakugou while rolling his eyes around. “Anyway, since we’re at it, we might as well do our usual end-of-day review right now. We’re keeping up with the schedule we agreed on, so there’s not much to talk about today.”

With that, the remainder of their peaceful dinner time was stretched to meet the same ending as their conversation. Much like the previous times, it was done in a very leisurely manner, making it quite agreeable with the food they were having. They could easily discuss the few topics pertinent to the current stage of their ‘mission’ without it getting in the way, even with some occasional sidetracking. By the time the end-of-day review was over, their plates and bowls had been fully emptied.

Todoroki promptly got started with his side of the house chores by picking up the pilled dishes and bringing them to the kitchen, while Bakugou got started with combing through today’s news. They had been far too busy with the move, last-minute shopping and then their

chatty dinner to check how things were going throughout the day.

“Anything of note aside from the news about us moving in together?” asked Todoroki, peering over his shoulder at Bakugou while he finished up the dishwashing.

“Not really. It was another calm day without any big, bad news,” said Bakugou, sitting cross-legged on the sofa while he browsed through news articles on his smartphone. “I’m pretty sure the worst that happened around here today was that annoying crowd in front of our former apartment complex.”

“Good. What about the news about us?” Todoroki asked next. No big, bad news was great news in its own right, especially with the two of them currently on vacation. It gave them peace of mind and allowed them to fully focus on their ‘mission’ without being called into duty due to an emergency.

“.....”

“Bakugou?” called Todoroki, once again peering over his shoulder after being met with silence.

“...They’re as annoying as they were yesterday…” grumbled Bakugou, the frustration he was feeling extremely clear in the tone of his voice.

“Maybe since nothing has happened this week except for the announcement of our ‘marriage’, all the journalists and reporters are focusing on the most exciting piece of news,” Todoroki wondered out loud, inwardly chuckling at Bakugou’s pouty reaction. “And that most exciting piece of news just so happens to be us.”

“What’s so exciting about a freaking marriage?” groaned Bakugou out of pure exasperation as he angrily leaned back on the sofa. “Hundreds of people get married every day all over the world! It’s not even a new thing! Humanity has had marriages of all sorts for millennia now!”

“Yeah, but those hundreds of people aren’t as famous as we are,” pointed out Todoroki, which got Bakugou growling like a wild animal yet again. “I just hope none of them bothers us tomorrow. Having to run away from the paparazzi and reporters while we’re in the middle of our date doesn’t sit right with me. Oh, speaking of which. Where do you want to go tomorrow?”

“Huh? Why the hell are you asking me that?” retorted Bakugou, purposefully scrunching up the frown on his face even further. “You’re the one who came up with that one. You should also be the one who organises it. If you can’t think of anything, we can just cancel it and continue focusing on our ‘mission’ in another way.”

“No! We’re not cancelling the date,” said Todoroki right away as he turned around in a rush, his wet hands dripping water all over the floor. He quickly grabbed the dishtowel and wiped his hands while walking to the living room area. “I can think up something for us to do throughout the day. Probably…”

“Hmph! For someone so gung-ho about that ‘date’, you sure sound like you have no idea what you’re gonna do about it,” scoffed Bakugou, his crimson eyes following Todoroki as he came closer to the sofa.

“I mean… I’ve never gone out on a date, let alone organised one,” confessed Todoroki, feeling a bit shy for having to admit such a thing. He had always been under the assumption that he would never have to deal with dates or a romantic relationship, busy as he was with training to become a pro hero and, now, being that pro hero. Because of that, he had never paid that topic any attention, even when it was right in front of him. “I do know the gist of it, though. Kinda…”

“It’s not like we can do anything all that special, the way we are being stalked left and right,” sighed Bakugou, still keeping Todoroki under close watch as he sat next to him on the sofa. “The ‘gist of it’ is more than enough.”

“So long as you’re okay with that, I’m good with it too,” said Todoroki, nodding in acknowledgement at Bakugou’s compromising remark. He then placed the dishtowel on the armrest, crossed his arms over his chest and tilted his head. “Still, I wonder what we should do… Going to well-known dating spots would be like asking for the paparazzi and reporters to find us. I don’t go out that often during my days off, unless it’s to visit my family or go for a meal out with Midoriya and the others. But none of that helps much with organising a date…”

“Just so we’re clear, I never said we have to remain completely hidden whenever we go outside,” added Bakugou after heaving another big sigh. “It’d actually benefit our plan if someone did recognise us while we’re out and about and shared about it on social media or something. You know, the normal stuff that happens whenever a random extra spots someone famous on the street. I just don’t want to have cameras shoved right in my face or get bombarded with questions left and right.”

“Oh, in that case, I think I know of a few places we can go,” Todoroki announced without missing a beat. It would be hard to come up with a good, fail-proof plan that enabled them to go on a date in total secrecy. But if it was okay to be occasionally spotted by passersby or staff members of the places they went to, then it would just be a matter of picking places that gave them a certain degree of privacy. “We could go watch a movie at the cinema or visit the aquarium. Both of those places tend to be pretty dark. That would make us harder to spot, right?”

“Yeah, that’s fine by me.” Since both of those places were within the prerequisites for a peaceful day out, Bakugou saw no problem with

accepting Todoroki's suggestions. "They're also convenient spots to stay away from the summer heat, so that's another plus."

"Then, as for lunch…" mumbled Todoroki as he went into thinking mode once again. They had the entire day tomorrow reserved for the date, so they could afford to pick several locations, even if they were far away from one another. Not to mention, they could use their borrowed vehicle to travel between each location, if that happened to be the most convenient transportation method. By combining those two pointers, there were quite a lot of places they could pick to eat at. "Why don't we go to one of the restaurants you've been meaning to visit during your lunch breaks? You like trying out new dishes to add more recipes to your cooking repertoire, right?"

"Huh…?" blurted out Bakugou, his heart skipping a beat for some unknown reason. He had told him about that in passing during one of their many conversations, but he wasn't actually expecting Todoroki to remember it. The mix of an erratic heartbeat with the stupefaction caused by such a simple question ended up leaving him unable to provide any sort of response.

"Is that no good?" asked Todoroki, leaning his body a bit to take a better look at Bakugou's face.

"N-No, that's fine…!" stammered Bakugou, promptly getting up from the sofa. "I have a sleep debt to work on, so I'm gonna go to bed earlier tonight! We can continue talking about this tomorrow!"

"Oh… Okay…" said Todoroki, slightly disappointed that this was it for today. However, he knew how important that strict sleep schedule was to Bakugou and how many hits it had taken this week. *It's a pity this is how it's going to be tonight, but it also means I'll have some extra time to look into the places we might go tomorrow.* "Good night, Bakugou."

“Yeah, yeah,” Bakugou replied with a dismissive wave of his hand behind his back as he stomped towards his room. As soon as he got inside, he closed the door and crouched down right in front of it while letting out a long groan. “‘The heck is wrong with me today? I’ve been freezing way too many times because of Mr Denseness over there…”

Todoroki’s sudden bouts of perfect clarity and perception didn’t seem to be a good match for him, the way he reacted to them in such an unusual manner. Dense Todoroki was aggravating, yes, but between this and that, Bakugou would pick the dense version any time of the day.

“Nah, it’s probably him who’s acting weird right now,” sighed Bakugou, pushing those previous thoughts away with a new explanation. “Nothing that a good night of sleep in his new bed won’t fix, I bet. He’ll be back to normal tomorrow, and so will I.”

Bakugou had done everything he had planned for today, and the following day would be spent mostly outside. There was a very big probability that things would go sideways during their fake date, given their long track record of coincidental incidents whenever the two of them were together. That was something he’d have to take into account as he got all the prep work for tomorrow done before going to bed.

He also needed to start planning how he’d slowly introduce more ‘independent living’ knowledge into Todoroki’s thick brain without it seeming overbearing or suspicious. While he still had plenty of time until the deadline Enji had given him, Bakugou wasn’t one to take it easy or wait until the very last minute to get stuff done. Luckily for him, Todoroki was pretty compliant and never fussed over being told to do this task or that request. Not that he was one to let others baby and take care of him to begin with…

“Can you do this for me every day?”

“Ngh…” The moment that scene from earlier flashed through his brain, Bakugou leaned his face against the back of his hand, half hiding with it the bright red shade slowly dyeing every inch of his skin. That question back then had rattled him to his core in a weirdly precise way, even though Bakugou couldn’t tell how or why exactly it had been so impactful. “Damn it… Screw him and his babbling mouth…”

Wasn’t proving to Enji that Todoroki could live on his own just fine, without the help of an ‘ideal bride’, one of the most fundamental portions of his side of their deal? Without that being securely accomplished, Enji would go back to looking for a new spouse for his son the moment the two of them got divorced. And yet…

“Why the hell is that idiot asking me to look after his dense ass…? Does he think I don’t have anything better to do with my free time?” mumbled Bakugou under his breath, giving his face some extra time for it to cool down before he got back up. “I have an entire villain group to catch, you moron… Ain’t no way I’m gonna be your full-time babysitter on top of all of that…”

It ended up taking Bakugou a handful of minutes to begin his preparations for tomorrow, the way his brain kept on replaying that and several other baffling moments nonstop.

Chapter 45

“Damn it… I ended up not sleeping a single wink…” grumbled Bakugou, the bedsheets of his bed all over the place from all the sleepless tossing and turning. He was supposed to be slowly waking up around this time, but instead, he had greeted the early morning rather than being greeted by it. “Did moving to a new place affect my circadian rhythm or something…?”

For someone who was used to falling asleep as soon as his head hit the pillow, it felt extremely weird to get a sudden bout of insomnia. Bakugou’s mind had raced throughout the entire night without a single pause for rest, going through the smallest of things that had happened the past few days and all the expectations for the near future. Given the contents of those thoughts, one would normally conclude that Bakugou had simply gone through the stereotypical ‘kid who is so excited about a field trip that he couldn’t sleep’ stage. But not Bakugou, no sir.

“Ugh… This couldn’t have happened on a worse day…” sighed Bakugou, sluggishly kicking off the bedsheet wrapped around his legs before he sat up on the bed. “Now I’m gonna get constant complaints about being in a pissy mood first thing in the morning…”

Said complaints would only put Bakugou in an even worse mood, as past interactions with his friends and former classmates had proved time and time again. While today wouldn’t be as busy and physically tiring as the previous day, there was quite a lot of stuff to do, and some of those ‘tasks’ required a certain degree of patience and calmness. Bakugou had no choice but to fix his mood somewhat.

I bet Half-and-Half Bastard is still snoozing away, Bakugou mumbled in the back of his mind as he walked out of his bedroom. He gave a quick glance at the closed door of Todoroki’s bedroom as he crossed the hallway and moved to the living room and kitchen area of the apartment. Much like he had expected, there were no signs of

Todoroki in there.

Since they hadn't placed any curtains up yet, the early morning sunlight was flooding the spacious room through the floor-to-ceiling glass 'wall'. Outside was already a clear blue sky, hinting at another sunny summer day. The weather would not be an issue throughout their fake date, by the looks of it. He walked up to the glass panels and silently looked outside while he stretched his arms and shoulders behind his back. It indeed looked like a pretty nice day, so he'd better not waste it.

Bakugou returned to his bedroom and got changed into some light sports clothes. He had been far too busy the past few days, but it was now time to return to his normal schedule for days off - which included some exercising. Breakfast and everything else could come afterwards. With his running shoes, smartphone, earphones and keys in hand, Bakugou headed towards the front door… but then hesitated about leaving.

"Maybe I should leave a note or something behind…" mumbled Bakugou under his breath. After some thinking, he turned around and returned to the kitchen, where he grabbed the same notepad as the previous day. He scribbled a quick 'off for a run' on it, ripped the page from the notepad and left it in a pretty conspicuous spot on the kitchen counter. *Now, if he wakes up before I return, he won't start nagging me with phone calls or messages.*

Free from all worries and constrictions, Bakugou left the apartment and took the elevator downstairs, using that downtime to do some light stretching and warm up his legs and ankles. When the elevator door opened, he readily put on the hoodie of his zip-up sweatshirt, not wanting to be spotted by one of their neighbours so early after their move. Fortunately, it was still too early for people to begin their commutes to work or school, and the spacious lobby was empty of its residents aside from Bakugou.

His run began just like all of his past runs did, albeit with an added feature: exploration for intel gathering. Bakugou wasn't familiar with this neighbourhood in the slightest. That wasn't very reassuring, given his current circumstances. He needed to map out the entire area while getting used to it as soon as possible. A quick run around the neighbourhood was the best way to do exactly that without coming across as suspicious. Bakugou made sure to take notice of the layout of the streets, which ones had the most activity and which ones could be used whenever he needed to lie low. He also made sure to memorise the stores and businesses around that area, in case they needed to buy something that could not be found in the shopping street they had gotten their groceries from.

When Bakugou reached the 30-minute mark, he turned around and started running back towards his new apartment complex. That would do for the time being. The next time he went on a morning run, he'd go in a different direction and add one more area to his mental map of the neighbourhood. By doing so, he'd soon have the entire area scouted, and he could once again deploy the strategies that had kept his address a complete secret from everyone for so many years. Obviously, he would also painstakingly teach said strategies to his 'husband', so he wouldn't accidentally dox them all over again.

By the time he got back home, Bakugou was feeling a whole lot more refreshed, but not fully satiated. As expected, not getting his daily quota of kicking some villain's ass was contributing to his moodiness. Maybe it had even been another factor to his sleepless night (spoiler alert: no, it had not). After so many stressful instances, mainly with the annoying 'professional stalkers' and the social media chaos, Bakugou was itching for some action, even if it was just as some solo training.

Me thinks it's time I give some good use to the balcony, Bakugou noted in the back of his mind after replenishing his body with some fresh water. The sun might have risen only a while ago, but the humidity was as high as ever already, leaving his body easily covered in a layer of sweat. After that short hydration break, he moved to the aforementioned balcony. Bakugou walked up to the middle of the balcony and looked around his surroundings anew. "Yeah, this is such

a convenient spot to have here."

Whenever a pro hero was called for an emergency dispatch while outside of their working hours or on a day off, speed was of the essence. Most of those dispatches had happened when Bakugou had been at home, and he had noticed time and time again that his small balcony ended up slowing him down, even if just by a second or two. However, his now spacious balcony had all the telltale signs of being the perfect departure ramp for him. He didn't need to worry about breaking or knocking down anything with the blast wave of his explosions or setting stuff on fire with the residual sparks, since he had plenty of free space in all directions.

After picking the perfect spot for some more exercising, shaded away from direct sunlight by the wall separating his balcony from the neighbour's, Bakugou didn't wait a second longer to resume his training. He started from the basics, doing some more stretching to make sure he didn't injure himself or overexert any old scars of his. From there, he worked his way up to more intense fighting exercises.

Those movements baked into his muscle memory helped him regain the edge and focus he had somewhat relaxed the past few days, albeit with the unfortunate side effect of shutting off his surroundings completely. The moment the slightest sound reached his ears, Bakugou's body attacked it by instinct - yet another automatic reaction he had instilled in it after years on end of battle training.

"I don't think it would be a good idea to break a glass panel on our second day living here," deadpanned Todoroki, having grabbed Bakugou's fist just as it was about to make contact with the glass of the balcony door.

"How about you say something first instead of just randomly popping up here?" grumbled Bakugou after clicking his tongue in annoyance. He dropped his striking arm back down to the side of his body while placing his other hand on his waist to admonish Todoroki more

vehemently. “Forget about the glass, I was about to sock you straight in the face had you not moved to the side.”

“Can I join you too?” asked Todoroki as he closed the sliding door once again, completely dismissing Bakugou’s comments.

“That’s all you have to say for yourself?” Bakugou retorted, inwardly heaving a long, fed-up sigh. He quickly regained his moody composure, however, and scoffed a cautionary statement. “If we do some battle training one-on-one right now, I will 100% kick your still half-asleep ass. Is that how you want to start your day?”

“Don’t worry, I’ve been watching you training for a while now,” reassured Todoroki with an expressionless thumbs up. “Give me just a couple of minutes, I’ll go get changed.”

“This guy just never learns, does he…?” sighed Bakugou under his breath as he watched Todoroki open the balcony door to his bedroom once again and go inside.

Even when they were students, Todoroki had the unusual habit of suddenly inviting him to train with him or to partake in internships at his father’s hero agency. Bakugou obviously gave him the middle finger or told him to fuck off the first couple of times that had happened, as he had no interest in training with someone who wouldn’t fight him seriously. But Todoroki’s persistence eventually wore him down, and Bakugou slowly started to say yes more often than not. Soon enough, Todoroki stopped waiting for his answer and simply took any response of his as an okay, much like it had just happened.

“Okay, we can start,” said Todoroki, back again on the balcony, this time equally dressed in workout clothes.

“You’re not gonna do any warm-up or something?” asked Bakugou, closely glancing sideways at Todoroki as they walked further away from all of the glass surfaces. He snorted, a mischievous smirk tugging at the corners of his lips. “I won’t go easy on you even if you aren’t in top shape. So don’t even try to use that as an excuse as to why you got your ass handed to you.”

“Yeah, I’m good to go already,” said Todoroki, positioning himself in a fighting stance to signal they could start whenever Bakugou felt like it. That earned him one more dismissive scoff, something that initially seemed to indicate that Bakugou was taking him fairly lightly. However, that easy-going reaction turned deadly in the blink of an eye. Bakugou didn’t hesitate to throw one more punch at Todoroki, which he readily blocked with his forearm. Todoroki winced slightly at the weight of the hit. “Ngh…”

Shortly after his punch made contact, Bakugou readily withdrew his arm, placing it back in front of his face to keep that fragile portion of his body well protected. Instead of waiting around for Todoroki to return that initial attack, he went for a second hit, this time by giving a full spin to his body to gain enough momentum for a hard-hitting high roundhouse kick. Todoroki managed to crouch down just in time to avoid the kick, turning that move into a follow-up attack in the form of a sweep with his leg.

“Heh.” Bakugou snickered at that predictable retaliation, jumping with just that sole targeted leg over his crouched down opponent through a half somersault. He easily landed with both feet and once again blocked Todoroki’s attack - a punch aiming to destabilise his landing. They both used the withdrawal of Todoroki’s fist to jump backwards simultaneously, opening a big gap between them. Bakugou’s evil smirk deepened as he leaned his upper body forward, the palms of his hands crackling with small sparkling explosions. “There, that should be enough to get your ‘fighting engine’ truly started. I ain’t holding back from here onwards.”

As soon as those words had exited his mouth, Bakugou zoomed forward faster than the sound of his explosions. He was right in front of Todoroki in less than a fraction of a second, leaving no space for hesitation or even any sort of thinking. Todoroki relied solemnly on his reaction speed and battle-hardened instinct to create an ice barrier to shield himself from Bakugou's blasts.

But for Bakugou, such an ice barrier was nothing more than a stepping stone to further aid the switch to his next move. He climbed up the ice wall with a single footstep and jumped over it, his palm aiming straight at Todoroki while he was airborne. Obviously, Bakugou couldn't go all out with his explosions, as he was at home and off duty, but he could still create a blast strong enough to send Todoroki crashing against his own ice wall… if he could hit him with it in the first place, of course.

Todoroki had been hit by one of such moves enough times to know how to deal with them without breaking a sweat. He created a thick, sturdy ice spike right in front of him to serve as his second shield while throwing a flurry of flames at Bakugou, hoping to make him divert his current position to some place further away.

Fortunately for him, Bakugou did have to make some adjustments to his landing so as not to get burnt to a crisp or skewered. Todoroki used this change in initiative to try to overwhelm Bakugou with multiple, non-stop attacks, erecting more and more ice spikes throughout the balcony. He couldn't hit his opponent even once with them, but that wasn't his intention to begin with. Using the thin layer of ice covering a portion of the balcony's floor, Todoroki dashed towards Bakugou, easily averting each ice spike without having to reduce his speed.

Todoroki threw another punch at Bakugou's face, which was once again diverted to the side with his arm without ever losing his trademark devilish smirk. Bakugou kept his arm raised next to his head, directly perpendicular to Todoroki's attacking limb, to use as additional support as he grabbed his arm with his other hand. He then dropped that first arm, gave a half spin with his body and shoved his

elbow against Todoroki's chest.

"Ugh…" Unable to move from that spot because of Bakugou's hold on his arm, Todoroki had no choice but to take that hit full-force. He got the air knocked out of his lungs in a particularly painful manner, but he wasn't about to let that interfere. He, too, grabbed the arm that was holding onto him, intending to push Bakugou's back against a nearby ice spike.

However, that turned out to be the worst move Todoroki could have made under these circumstances.

As soon as Todoroki grabbed his arm, Bakugou returned his body to its previous stance and used that momentum to jump once again. He wrapped his legs around Todoroki's neck and head while pushing their arms downwards. Once he felt Todoroki starting to fall forward, he curled and tucked his upper body at the same time he pulled at Todoroki's head with his legs.

Oh, crap…! Somehow, Todoroki managed to soften his fall to a certain point, but he was still slammed back-first on the floor. What he couldn't protect himself from at all was the way Bakugou fell alongside him, right on top of his chest. Bakugou hadn't choked him by squeezing his thighs against his head and neck, but Todoroki nevertheless ended up just as breathless.

"Another victory for me, hehehe," snickered Bakugou, letting go of Todoroki's arm now that he no longer needed it. He patted Todoroki's wheezing chest with his hand while he looked down at his face with a smug expression. "Then again, isn't that how it always goes? I can't think of a single time you won against me."

…He looks so pleased with himself for this, deadpanned Todoroki in the back of his mind, his facial expression equally devoid of any emotion.

He could actually think of a few things he had won compared to Bakugou, but he was far too busy dealing with this current ‘loss’ to worry about retorts. Todoroki used his arms to prop his upper body up bit by bit, which got Bakugou sliding down from his chest to his lap.

“W-Whoa…!” yelped Bakugou, instinctively grabbing onto Todoroki’s t-shirt to stop himself from tumbling either sideways or backwards. “Hey, how about a warning fi- Uh…”

Todoroki’s face drew closer to his so quickly and so suddenly that Bakugou was forced to swallow his words - otherwise, his heart would have probably jumped out of his chest through his open mouth. The abruptly shortened distance got his entire face feeling far hotter than it already was due to all the exercising. On the other hand, Todoroki remained as cool as a cucumber, seemingly completely unbothered by any of it.

“Have you eaten breakfast already?” asked Todoroki without a care in the world. He even leisurely placed his arms around Bakugou’s waist, his fingers intertwining behind his back, like that was the most natural outcome of having his ‘husband’ sitting on his lap.

“H-Huh? No, I haven’t,” said Bakugou, slightly confused by the sudden topic change and extremely flustered by the physical proximity.

“Oh. Then, are you going to cook something here at home, or should we eat breakfast outside before we start our date?” asked Todoroki next, offering a couple of suggestions for what their next step should be.

“I was planning on making breakfast after I’m done with my exercising and gotten changed out of these sweaty clothes,” stated Bakugou, briefly looking down at his sports clothes in an attempt to keep his fidgeting fully under control. He was itching to get off of

Todoroki's lap and place some more distance between their bodies, but his dense 'spouse' was completely oblivious to his plight.

"Okay," acknowledged Todoroki with a single nod of his head. He then promptly separated his hands and grabbed onto Bakugou's buttocks.

"Wha-!?" yelped Bakugou, his body flinching from head to toes before it became as stiff as a board. Grabbing his ass just like that was too forward a move even for Todoroki, and Bakugou was ready to slap some sense into his moronic brain for it… until he realised Todoroki wasn't groping him per se but adjusting his hold onto him to get back up while carrying him. Bakugou went from completely flabbergasted to fuming mad in a matter of seconds. "Hey! I might have won, but I don't need to be carried around as the victorious one! Put me down! RIGHT! NOW!"

"This way is faster," said Todoroki as he slid his hands from under Bakugou's butt to under his thighs - this way, not only was it easier to carry Bakugou, but his dangling legs wouldn't be able to get in the way. By doing so, their upper bodies also got squished against one another more tightly, which placed their faces fairly close once again.

"I keep telling you it's not!" hissed Bakugou, his legs wiggling around in protest. Since that wasn't doing much and Todoroki kept leisurely carrying him towards the balcony's door, he deployed his fists too, banging them on top of his shoulders. However, none of that seemed to be bothering or fazing Todoroki, who continued walking as normal. "Grrr… This is your last chance. Put me down or suffer the consequences!"

"I'll suffer the consequences," deadpanned Todoroki, even though he was inwardly chuckling at Bakugou's childish hissy fit. The way he went from victoriously smug to a temper tantrum had always warmed up Todoroki's chest, especially when he was the direct reason for said change. It wasn't as if Bakugou would seriously injure him while they

were horsing around like this, so he had nothing to be afraid of and plenty to look forward to. He could barely wait to find out what the ‘consequence’ was going to be this time.

“You think I’m playing around with you!?” Bakugou retorted, so irked at Todoroki’s unbothered semblance that his eyebrow was twitching. It looked like he was going to have to put his money where his mouth was for real, or else his sleep-deprived pissy mood would make him explode with not only Todoroki but also their brand new home. Bakugou for sure wasn’t about to damage the apartment just because his brainless ‘husband’ was in the mood to rub him the wrong way.

Without wasting a single second more, Bakugou grabbed Todoroki’s face with both hands and tilted it upwards. He could already see the confusion written all over his expressionless face before he provided him with the well-deserved ‘divine retribution’. Bakugou simply scoffed at it and proceeded to bite and gnaw on Todoroki’s beautifully sculptured nose.

“Owowowow…” groaned Todoroki, his walking getting slightly wobbly due to the stabbing pain in his nose and the fact that he couldn’t see where he was going. He somehow managed to get inside the apartment without crashing against the glass wall, but he did bump into the sofa and nearly tripped on a table leg as he delved deeper into the living room.

Todoroki was almost at a point where he wanted to beg Bakugou for some mercy, fearing he would accidentally drop him on the floor and make his situation a hundred times worse. However, he had serious doubts that Bakugou would show him any leniency, the way he was gnawing on his nose like a dog on a bone.

I guess I have no other choice…, Todoroki sighed in the back of his mind. He regrettably adjusted his hold to Bakugou’s thighs before he slowly started lowering him. The moment his feet touched the floor, Bakugou’s teeth finally released his throbbing nose. Once Bakugou

was successfully unhanded, Todoroki took his hand to his nose to check if it was still fully intact.

"Since you want to act like a clown, I gave you a bright red nose to match," Bakugou spat out, his frown deepening when he saw Todoroki sighing in relief at still having a nose on his face. He wasn't entirely satisfied with his petty revenge, but that would have to do for now. Bakugou scoffed, turned around and started stomping to his bedroom.

"Wait, Bakugou," called Todoroki as he hurried to grab hold of the back of Bakugou's sports sweatshirt and prevent him from leaving just yet. Bakugou halted and looked over his shoulder with a grumpy glare in his eyes. "I almost forgot one thing."

"What now…?" grumbled Bakugou, the sharpness of his glare softening into a merely pouting expression when Todoroki let go of his clothes.

"Good morning," said Todoroki, a soft smile on his lips. He was already expecting to hear some complaints about this, like 'That's dumb' or 'What a waste of time'. But, against all odds, what he was met with was silence. Bakugou kept looking his way without saying anything, for better or for worse. *Huh? Why is there no reaction? Am I missing something?*

Todoroki wasn't all that good at reading other people's facial expressions, and that went doubly so when it came to Bakugou's, all thanks to his volatile personality and unpredictable moods. That was why Todoroki could only interpret Bakugou's current silence as him waiting for something else to follow after the 'good morning'.

Oh, I know, gasped Todoroki to his own buttons, a lightbulb pinging at the formulation of a brilliant idea - all of this having happened within a second or two of his initial greeting. Todoroki leaned closer and

gave a small smooch directly to Bakugou's lips. *We have to be good at pretending to be a couple, and this is how couples greet each other in the morning, isn't it?*

"...You're so damn annoying," grumbled Bakugou under his breath, his facial expression steadily becoming more and more sulky. He scoffed at Todoroki once again to physically and verbally demonstrate his exasperation and then resumed his trip to his bedroom.

And there's the complaint, acknowledged Todoroki in the back of his mind at the same time he nodded his head. Now that he had obtained all of the reactions he had been looking for, he could proceed with their plans for today as agreed.

After more or less gauging the severity of Bakugou's current mood, Todoroki concluded that they had a very nice fake date ahead of them.

Chapter 46

Despite usually being the slower one at getting stuff done, Todoroki ended up being the one who got ready for their ‘date’ the fastest.

When Todoroki came out of his bedroom dressed for a day out (and yes, this time he did go out of his way to try to dress himself in a way that wouldn’t make him stand out or catch the attention of both fans and paparazzi alike), he found himself alone in the living room and kitchen area.

I guess Bakugou must have taken a bath as he was changing out of his sports clothes, concluded Todoroki as he sat down on the sofa to patiently wait for his ‘husband’ to come out of his room. Bakugou had told him he’d be making breakfast again, and he was already feeling on cloud nine over it. *I wonder what he’s going to cook today. That cold miso soup he made yesterday was really good.*

Excited and expectant as he was, Todoroki couldn’t help but fidget around on the sofa. He’d glance every now and then at the corridor leading to Bakugou’s bedroom, using that as a suppressor for his urge to go knock on his door. However, since that only made him grow more impatient, Todoroki eventually switched to checking the news on his smartphone.

The weather will be nice and warm today, so that’s one less thing to worry about, concluded Todoroki in the back of his mind while checking the weather report. After that, he switched to his news feed, which mainly featured news about pro heroes and how the country was faring at the moment. Todoroki couldn’t help but chuckle at the fact that a good portion of the pro hero news was about the two of them and their marriage announcement. *It’s no wonder Bakugou gets so pissy about them. Some have pretty outlandish titles and so many imaginary talking points. Then again, our entire ‘relationship’ is a lie. Of course they are trying to come up with something that supports our announcement, no matter how weird and sudden it might sound to everyone else.*

Out of curiosity, Todoroki ended up tapping on one of said outlandish news articles, just so he could get a good idea of what the paparazzi and journalists had been saying behind their backs. The article in question mainly focused on what they had been up to these past few days since the marriage announcement, covering from the press conference all the way up to their move to the new apartment. No mentions were made about their new address, so it seemed they hadn't been doxed just yet. The latter half of the article was a quick summary of their backgrounds in terms of their job and all of their accomplishments as pro heroes to date. All in all, the title itself was the only noteworthy anomaly of the entire article.

Only when Todoroki moved on to the next article did he get a good dose of 'convenient plot points that never happened in the way they were being described'. Their so-called 'relationship' was being glazed so hard that it might as well be a shiny mythical creature of some sort. 75% of its contents were romanticised opinions, and the remaining 25% misconstructed facts. Some truth was sprinkled in here and there, but it was overshadowed by the ludicrous fabrications.

The journalist saying they had always suspected we were in a relationship is so funny, Todoroki chuckled to himself, extremely amused by the writer's unfounded claims. The writer in question had done a good job hunting down all sorts of public interactions between him and Bakugou throughout the years, but the romantic spin they had put into them was nothing more than a fairy tale. A believable fairy tale, but still a fairy tale nevertheless. *Well, most of what's written here isn't real, but at least it lends some credibility to our claims. It's far better that they create imaginary stories about us than to have them doubt our 'relationship', like Dad does.*

There was also the additional benefit that these articles definitely annoyed Enji. He was the only one crying out about how their marriage was a sham. Not even people who disliked pro hero Dynamight or hardcore fans of pro hero Shouto were denying their relationship, though not without some complaints and sadness about it. Todoroki could only imagine what sort of face his father made

whenever these articles reached him, or what kind of hissy fit he threw while watching the news.

I'd prefer it if we could enjoy our date in peace and quiet, but part of me also wants us to get caught in the act so that photos of us eventually get to Dad, Todoroki sighed to his own buttons as he switched to a different news article, this time not connected to their fabricated scandal. *He hasn't said anything else since yesterday morning, so who knows what exactly he's planning next… I know he won't try to ruin our date directly, not after being told off by Mom. But I can't help but have the feeling he's only just getting started with his inconvenient visits and nonsense schemes to get us divorced…*

-.-

"Achoo!" Enji sneezed, followed by some sniffling and a grumbled complaint.

"Well, well, well. Looks like a certain someone is about to catch a summer cold," snickered Burnin, a wide, knowing smirk on her lips as she glanced to the man sitting next to her on the passenger seat. She crossed her arms over the steering wheel while leaning closer to it, using that as a chance to stretch her back after sitting there for so long. "Me thinks it's about time we get you back to the hero agency, instead of sitting here doing nothing."

"It's the AC's fault," grumbled Enji as he stabbed his index finger on the AC's button. He lowered the strength and changed the direction of the cool breeze coming out of the parked company car, but made no attempts at instructing his sidekick to move from that spot by the sidewalk. "We're not going anywhere. This stakeout will last for as long as I please. And by that I mean it will continue until I find enough evidence about their fake marriage. So stop distracting me, or else we won't see them exiting the building and lose track of them."

“Yes, yes…” sighed Burnin while rolling her eyes around. Entertaining her boss and his childish plan to catch his son and his partner doing who knows what red-handed wasn’t part of her job description, but she was getting paid either way, so why not have an unorthodox workday for a change? *Good luck, Shouto, Dynamight. You’re so gonna need it.*

-.-

“Hmm… Maybe I’m overthinking it and being too paranoid and pessimistic,” concluded Todoroki after giving it a bit more thought. Even if Enji was putting his ducks in a row to officially retire, he was still a very serious and busy man. No matter how much he disliked Todoroki’s method of avoiding an arranged marriage, he’d never sacrifice his work hours or use them for unrelated matters. (Or so Todoroki thought.)

“What are you mumbling about all on your own? Has your craziness finally reached the point where you talk to imaginary friends?” asked Bakugou, an eyebrow slightly arched as he walked into the living room only to see Todoroki talking to himself. Rather than go join him on the sofa, he took a sharp turn into the kitchen. “I’m gonna get breakfast started, so get your lazy ass in here.”

“Okay,” said Todoroki, happily jumping out of the sofa while putting his smartphone inside his pants’ pocket. He walked to the kitchen and waited on the sidelines for a while, as Bakugou gathered all the things he’d need. Once everything was on top of the counter by the stove, Todoroki took his chance and glued himself to his back yet again, his chin neatly nestled on top of Bakugou’s shoulder so he could better watch what he was doing. “What are you making today?”

“Grrr… French toasts…” grumbled Bakugou, his frown deepening by a tenfold at the annoyance clinging to him. However, he told himself this was just a temporary nuisance that was conducive to the success of their ‘mission’. Plus, Todoroki did wait until he was in a stationary

position before he glued himself to him, once again making it impossible for Bakugou to kick him out of there for getting in his way. He truly had no choice but to leave him be and move on with the cooking.

“French toasts? I don’t think I’ve ever eaten that,” commented Todoroki, going through his memories to see if he found a match to this culinary experience.

“It’s a good way to use leftover sliced bread,” explained Bakugou while removing the slices of bread from the plastic bag. There were only a handful of them left, as Todoroki had previously used that same bread to make some regular toasts for himself and Bakugou. “Plus, it makes the bread even more filling, which is convenient whenever there’s not much of it.”

“Oh, I see,” said Todoroki, nodding along at Bakugou’s ‘cooking lesson’ while committing the information to memory. “Is it hard to make?”

“Nope, it’s easy and fast,” Bakugou replied as he placed the sliced bread on the counter, next to the bowl where he was about to mix the wet ingredients. “It’s simple enough that even an incompetent cook like you can make it, which is why I’m showing it to you.”

“I’d prefer it if you called me ‘unexperienced’ or ‘newbie’,” deadpanned Todoroki, not liking all that much the sound of the word ‘incompetent’ - even though there was some truth to it, if he were to be honest and unbiased.

“Neither of those words expresses your chaotic cooking style accurately. A newbie chef lacks experience, an incompetent one lacks common sense,” scoffed Bakugou, going straight for the jugular with his snarky comment. “I’m willing to elevate you to newbie once you

prove yourself competent enough not to slaughter food twice over."

"You're good at teaching others, but you're definitely not teacher material," Todoroki deadpanned again, albeit with a slightly sulkier tone this time around. Bakugou simply laughed at it, not even trying to defend himself against said accusation.

Since Bakugou had only been cooking Japanese food, Todoroki thought that would be what they'd be eating the most from now on. But of course Bakugou had also mastered the art of cooking Western dishes, if Todoroki was to base himself on how proficient his 'husband' was at making French toast. Adding the prep work to the cooking time and plating, it didn't take Bakugou more than 20 minutes to serve breakfast at the dining table.

"These are pretty good," said Todoroki after his first bite of the French toast. With the amount of sugar and butter Bakugou had used, he thought it would come out pretty sweet, but the flavour was actually quite mellow. The texture of the bread took a bit to get used to, given that it was half soggy, half chewy. However, it overall went very well as a breakfast meal.

"Glad to hear that," replied Bakugou with a noncommittal shrug, far too busy cutting his French toast with a knife and fork to be paying full attention to Todoroki. He then stuffed a square chunk into his mouth, slowly chewing the sweetness while checking the time on his smartphone. Once he swallowed the food, he asked, "Have you already decided what we'll be doing today?"

"Oh. Yeah," acknowledged Todoroki with a small nod of his head. He placed down the cutlery on the plate, reaching out for his smartphone too to get access to the notes he had taken the previous night, just in case. "I picked both the aquarium and going to the cinema, like we talked about yesterday. The aquarium opens at 10, so we can leave whenever you feel like it. And I decided to save the movie for after we have lunch. That's about it. Unless you have any other suggestions for

afterwards, that is."

"I'm fine with just that," said Bakugou, preferring that simple fake date over an elaborate plan that could go wrong due to external factors. "Fewer activities means we can take our time doing the few things we want to do. Which also means fewer opportunities for those professional stalkers to hunt us down and begin their harassment all over again. Heh, not that I think they'll bother us much after I'm done with them…"

That's slightly worrying, deadpanned Todoroki in the back of his mind, his heterochromatic eyes stuck gazing at Bakugou to try to figure out just what exactly he was planning on doing to those poor paparazzi and journalists. However, Bakugou stopped the conversation completely after dropping that foreshadowing comment, leaving Todoroki with no other option but to wait and see what would happen next. "Do we leave after we finish eating breakfast, or should we stay home for a little while longer?"

"Yeah, we're leaving after this," declared Bakugou before taking another bite of his meal. After chewing and swallowing it, he added, "But not to go to the aquarium. We need to pay a quick visit somewhere else before that."

"Where?" Todoroki asked, an eyebrow slightly arched out of puzzlement. Bakugou hadn't mentioned at any point needing to take care of any errands, nor had they agreed on a specific plan for today when creating the timeline and schedule for the initial phase of their unofficial mission.

"You'll see, hehehe," Bakugou shrugged off, his lips slowly stretching into a knowing smirk right before proceeding with his breakfast.

"Are you not telling me where you want to go because you know I'll

try to stop you, or just because you're still in the mood to psychologically mess with me?" deadpanned Todoroki, fully aware of what it meant whenever Bakugou started with his evil laugh.

"Yes," said Bakugou, nice and short, while pointing his fork at Todoroki. He then graciously moved the fork down and stabbed it squarely in the middle of another piece of the French toast. Bakugou looked quite content with his unclear answer as he kept on eating his breakfast - there was nothing sweeter than a perfect victory, after all, and that was precisely what he was guaranteed to get with his little surprise plan.

"At least tell me that violence isn't about to be the answer to our paparazzi problem," requested, no, almost begged Todoroki, inwardly sighing at Bakugou's characteristic evil nature. By the sound of it, Todoroki was about to be tasked with the very important mission of keeping his 'husband' under control, which meant he needed as much energy and food as possible. He immediately grabbed his cutlery and resumed his breakfast, putting a big piece of the delicious French toast in his mouth.

"That would depend on what you consider to be 'violence'," snickered Bakugou, partially amused at Todoroki's sudden eating rush. It wasn't as if he'd leave him behind if he finished breakfast first, but it was funnier if he let him thought he would. "Am I gonna teach them a lesson? Yes. Will there be some bruised egos and whatnot? Also yes. Will the majority of them leave us the heck alone after I'm done with them? Absolutely. Though well, I'm sure there will be some masochistic idiots or moronic sore losers who will insist on continuing to stalk us, but they will come after us in far fewer numbers. That will make them easy peasy to crush, if necessary."

"That doesn't really answer my question," pointed out Todoroki, even though he already felt a bit relieved and less on his guard. If Bakugou had been planning on using his fists or Quirk, he would not have danced around the subject and simply said he was going to kick their asses on the spot. But since he was being so vague about it, his plan was most likely far tamer than a beating.

“I know. I’m doing that on purpose,” Bakugou admitted while shrugging his shoulders. “Just think of it as when you suddenly pick me up to take me somewhere. It’s quicker if you don’t know about it beforehand, hehehe.”

“You’re too vindictive,” sighed Todoroki, starting to get the feeling that this was simply another of Bakugou’s petty acts of revenge. Even if it wasn’t originally, Bakugou sure had found a way to turn it into one.

“Compliments won’t take you anywhere,” scoffed Bakugou with a dismissive roll of his eyes. “Now hurry it up, or else the aquarium will be too crowded by the time we get there.”

“I know, I know,” said Todoroki, once again letting out a resigned sigh. *I guess I’ll let him do as he pleases for the time being. But the moment he goes too far or gets himself in trouble, I’m grabbing him and taking him back to the car…*

“Hey… I know what you’re thinking,” grumbled Bakugou, his eyes tightening into thin slits as he suspiciously glared at Todoroki. “If you dare to grab me and remove me from any place, you might as well go back to your daddy’s house because I swear I’ll make you sleep on the balcony for the rest of the summer. The rainy season might be over, but it’s still humid as fuck out there during the night!”

“Cross my heart I won’t,” deadpanned Todoroki while cutting the remainder of his French toast in half.

“You’re still such a crappy liar,” scoffed Bakugou, instantly seeing through Todoroki’s words. His face might be as expressionless as ever and his voice as monotone as it usually was, but it was still so very

obvious he didn't mean any of it.

"So long as you don't misbehave, I won't be a liar either," pointed out Todoroki, chuckling a little bit at the way Bakugou clicked his tongue at him.

"'The hell do you think I am? A brat who throws tantrums any time they're out and about?" Bakugou grumbled some more as he gobbled up the last bite of his breakfast. The 'if the shoe fits' expressionless demeanour on Todoroki's face got him to drop his cutlery noisily onto the used plate. "Fine! I'll be on my best behaviour! In fact, I'll be so nice to everyone that they'll think I've been replaced with a doppelganger!"

"No, that would be pretty weird," backtracked Todoroki, doing his very best not to laugh at such a 'scary threat'. "Be as moody as you want. Just don't pick a fight with anyone, alright?"

"You're the one who's trying to pick a fight with me!" Bakugou hissed while pointing accusingly at Todoroki.

"Oh. I just realised why you're still so cranky first thing in the morning," gasped Todoroki, a sudden realisation hitting him as hard as a freight train.

"Don't ignore me, asshole!" angrily growled Bakugou, following Todoroki with his glaring eyes as he got up from his seat and walked around the dining table. He truly felt like grabbing his fork again and poke him with it to get him to back off from whatever stupid thought had just popped up in his brain. Bakugou was still considering his retaliatory options when Todoroki stopped next to his seat and grabbed the top of the backrest of his chair while leaning his upper body forward, which put him closer to the same eye level as him than if he had been standing straight. "...What now?"

“One wasn’t enough, was it? That’s my bad,” sincerely apologised Todoroki, closing in on Bakugou even further to be able to kiss him. Thanks to the sugary breakfast they had been eating, his lips tasted even sweeter than usual. However, just like how it went whenever Todoroki kissed him out of the blue, Bakugou’s face was scrunched up in an adorable blushing pout.

“...I’m not as needy and clingy as you. My mood isn’t dependent on how many times I’m kissed,” grumbled Bakugou, partially offended that Todoroki had reached such a silly conclusion about his cranky personality. At first, he thought Todoroki would retort to his comeback and deny the truth, but instead, he kissed him one more time. “Hey! Stop ignoring what I’m say- Mmh!”

Todoroki didn’t think twice about kissing Bakugou a third time and cutting his admonishment short in the process. The small, exasperated groan he let out mid-kiss was endearing in a way that only someone as hissy and belligerent as Bakugou could be. It was a bit risky to do this sort of thing, of course, but Todoroki found that danger to be part of the appeal. Were you really kissing Bakugou if there was no threat of receiving a point-blank explosion to the face or getting hit with an elbow strike to the gut?

With that said, the fact that Todoroki was still completely unharmed spoke for itself. Even when Todoroki dialled up the intensity of the kisses, going from light pecks to straight-out making out, the only reaction he got from Bakugou was him grabbing the front of his shirt, preventing him from ending it as randomly as he had started it.

Perhaps Bakugou hadn’t been cranky due to a lack of kisses, like he had said, but receiving a buttload of them sure did wonders to improve it. He would never admit it, either out loud or to himself, due to his inherent stubbornness, of course. However, even someone as dense as Todoroki could tell it worked really, really well. So much so, it could easily slip out of his control if he wasn’t careful about it.

Bakugou might have inadvertently teased him a bit too much by denying him kisses countless times the previous day, because now that he had him, Todoroki really didn't feel like letting go, not even for a second. Those 'gold stars' he had lost for having cheated, or the deflection that had crushed his bed-making suggestion, were being collected with double, maybe triple, the normal interest.

We have a date to go to, but… Five more minutes of this should be fine, right? Todoroki asked himself in the back of his mind, capturing Bakugou's pleasantly warm and rosy cheeks with both of his hands. Rather than push him and risk making him fall off the chair a second time, he pulled Bakugou closer while tilting his head upwards just a smidge. They weren't in the most comfortable kissing positions, but hey, a kiss was a kiss. Todoroki wasn't about to give up on it just because his back was screaming at him, begging for a redo of the whole thing somewhere else more practical.

By the time those five minutes went by - or what Todoroki deemed to have been five minutes of non-stop making out, at the very least -, they were equally as breathless, their lips smudged by the remnants of the kisses. Todoroki obviously couldn't end it just like that, not after seeing such a captivating look on Bakugou's flushed face, and kissed him one last time (for now).

"...Are the words 'in moderation' simply not a part of your dictionary…?" mumbled Bakugou, promptly turning his head so Todoroki wouldn't get the chance to steal even more kisses from him.

"You make it really hard not to want even more," chuckled Todoroki, kissing the top of Bakugou's head before he pulled away for good and straightened his standing position. As he was doing so, he got to partially witness the moment Bakugou's cheekbones turned even redder, nearly getting to the point of perfectly matching the crimson of his eyes. Never before had Todoroki experienced his heartbeat accelerating all of a sudden, without a concrete explanation. There was just something about seeing Bakugou blush in such a striking way

that got him feeling equally as flustered. “...Why are you reacting like that to a kiss to the top of your head and not when I had my tongue in your mouth?”

“Ugh, shut up…” grumbled Bakugou as he turned his head some more. Since that didn’t feel enough, he also stretched out his arm and started pushing Todoroki further away from him. “How would you even know? It’s not like you can see my face while we’re kissing…”

“Oh, so does that mean you also react like that while I’m kissing you?” asked Todoroki, his head innocently tilted to the side.

“What!? N-No, that’s obviously not what I meant!” yelped Bakugou, forced to look right back at Todoroki with a scandalised expression. “I was just saying you shouldn’t jump to conclusions when you have no evidence to back it up! Plus, it’s my god damned face! I know what happens and what doesn’t happen to it, alright!?”

“Okay, let’s find out then,” said Todoroki with a serious, resolute nod of his head, his hands already moving towards Bakugou to capture his face once again.

“Huh!? Now’s not the time for this bullshit! Hurry up and finish- Ah! Wait, don’t just- Todo- I’m telling you to waaaaaait…!”

After five additional minutes of making out, Todoroki confirmed that yes, Bakugou did in fact have the same reaction to both types of kisses.

Chapter 47

“I know you said you were going to deal with our paparazzi problem for good, but I didn’t think you were going straight for one of their headquarters,” deadpanned Todoroki as he looked at the building in front of them.

Yes, they were both standing in front of the building where a well-known mass media corporation, amongst other companies, was located. The building was a tall skyscraper in the business area of their city, surrounded by several other infrastructures of lower or similar heights. For Todoroki, all of these buildings looked the same to him, unless he had anything to do with any of them, but he managed to sort of understand where they were headed when he saw the name of the mass media corporation written on a metal plate on the front side of the building.

“You’re not about to throw a hissy fit in there to complain about their journalists and reporters, right?” asked Todoroki, just in case he needed to deploy his emergency plan and drag Bakugou out of there before he even set one foot inside.

“Do you seriously think doing a Karen inside of one mass media company would affect the journalists of all other mass media companies?” Bakugou retorted back while rolling his eyes in exasperation. He resumed walking and went inside the building’s busy lobby area, where the elevators for the upper floors could be found. “I said I was going straight for the throat. Obviously, complaining to their managers or bosses isn’t part of the plan.”

“So what exactly is the plan, then?” asked Todoroki anew, an eyebrow slightly arched in distrust. If Bakugou wasn’t there to pick a fight with a mass media corporation, then what exactly could they be here for? What kind of plan would even universally affect all other similar companies in one go?

“An interview,” said Bakugou with a dismissive shrug, as if his words hadn’t been the total opposite of what others would have thought he’d say.

Todoroki was about to let out an extremely lost and confused ‘Huh?’ when someone else caught both of their attention.

“Ah! I’ve been waiting for both of you!” said a chipper, happy-sounding voice. The same journalist who had asked them a bunch of questions during their initial press conference was rushing towards them with a big, excited smile on her face. When she got to them, she quickly straightened out her clothes and offered a formal bow to the two pro heroes. “Thank you very much for accepting to do an interview with me, Dynamight, Shouto.”

“Yeah. We’re in a bit of a rush here, so let’s get started with it already,” instructed Bakugou while pointing at the elevator with a jerk of his chin.

“Of course. I’ll take you to one of our dressing rooms for guests so you can be undisturbed while I give a final check to the studio where we’ll be doing the interview,” acknowledged the journalist with an animated nod of her head. “Follow me, please.”

With that, the journalist happily guided them to the elevator and took them up to the mass media company she worked at. Several of her coworkers and other staff members gasped and gawked at the fact that the latest source of non-stop news in the mass and social media universe was right there in the flesh, but it all ended when they were taken to the aforementioned private room.

Once it was just the two of them in there, the questions started flying

even before the interview started.

“Didn’t you say we wouldn’t do anything else with the mass media aside from that initial press conference at my hero agency?” asked Todoroki, staring fixedly at Bakugou with a suspicious deadpan demeanour. Now was his last chance to get some answers about this so-called plan his ‘husband’ had plotted behind his back.

“I’m not doing this because I want to, alright?” sighed Bakugou as he crossed his arms over his chest and leaned the back of his hips against one of the tables of the dressing room. “But since those annoyances are so damn frustrating to have constantly around, I came up with a sure-fire way to get rid of them. Remember what I said back then at the press conference? I only cooperate with the ‘professional stalkers’ who actually respect my boundaries and aren’t too intrusive on my personal life. That woman proved herself to be one of them right in front of that gigantic crowd, and while we were live on TV and wherever else to boot. Which means, if I backtrack my previous statement and we do an interview with just her, the moment it airs on their news channel, every single journalist, reporter, and paparazzi will see the error in their ways and leave us the heck alone in hopes of eventually being graced with our presence too. Though I guess they’ll be far too busy kicking themselves over the fact they lost one hell of an opportunity to have an exclusive interview with the hottest topic of right now to even think about that, hehehehe!”

“Why exactly did you keep that a secret from me up until now?” inquired Todoroki while he let out a tired sigh in the back of his mind. Instead of being the messy ordeal that he had been expecting, Bakugou’s plan was actually much more sound and safe than he had initially thought. Which, rightfully so, brought up the question he had just voiced out loud: why hadn’t he just told him about it right from the start?

“Hmph! It’s not that big of a deal. Why would I waste my time explaining something to you beforehand when I can just do it right here, like I’m doing now?” Bakugou shrugged off the question and went to grab his smartphone from his pocket. A few seconds later,

Todoroki's phone was beeping with the arrival of a text message. "Those are the topics I gave her that we're willing to address during the interview. That was my one and only condition for doing this interview with her. She accepted it without any arguing or compromising attempts, so I booked it with her for whenever it was most convenient for everyone involved, which happened to be this morning. The end."

"How did she even get in contact with you?" Todoroki asked next, still slightly reticent about how all of this came into being.

"She didn't. I got in contact with her," snickered Bakugou, quite satisfied that Todoroki had asked him about that. How else would he understand how truly a genius master planner he was? "I asked around through my contacts while we were waiting for the moving company to arrive, and I eventually got what I was looking for. After that, it was easy to have her agree to this quick exclusive interview. I mean, who would say no to that under these circumstances, am I right?"

So that's what was keeping him so busy back then…, sighed Todoroki in the back of his mind. He really should have known better and pressed Bakugou a bit harder to get a proper answer. Todoroki sighed one more time, this time audibly. "Okay, I get it. I'll go along with it. But next time, warn me ahead of time instead of waiting for the very last minute."

"Hmph!" That was the only reply Bakugou offered to him - a moody scoff that neither accepted nor denied Todoroki's request.

"So what exactly is the topic of this interview? Is it our 'relationship' once again?" asked Todoroki as he grabbed his phone and went to check what Bakugou had just sent him. Reading through the list got him the answer he was seeking. "I see. So it's a more in-depth version of the press conference, but with questions you selected ahead of time."

“You should know how to answer all of those questions, after how much we’ve discussed about our ‘relationship’ and background history to deal with Endeavor,” pointed out Bakugou, not all that worried about either of them accidentally saying something they should not. Or more like, there was a possibility of Todoroki saying more than he should, but it was concerning the latest developments in terms of their so-called ‘marriage’ rather than about them faking all of it for the sake of an unofficial mission. “Just be sure to keep on topic and not diverge into anything that will get me punching you in the face once we’re back home.”

“I’ll try my best,” acknowledged Todoroki with an expressionless thumbs-up. After all the times he was told off by Bakugou due to sharing too much information with unrelated people, Todoroki was very much aware that he needed to hold his tongue - all the more so whenever Bakugou was around to witness it. Besides, Bakugou wasn’t the only one who needed to be on his best behaviour. So did Todoroki if he wanted their date to go well or even happen in the first place. *Well, with the things we’re going to be discussing with that journalist, I doubt I’ll accidentally share more than I should.*

With both of them satisfied with the answers they got from the other, they decided to end the conversation there and wait for their ‘hostess’ to come back to take them to the studio where the interview was going to be held. Not that they could discuss such private matters that extensively in this sort of place. They were in the middle of ‘enemy territory’ and could very well be eavesdropped on by a sneaky journalist or reporter if they weren’t careful.

The wait also ended up not being very long, as the journalist had taken Bakugou’s initial words seriously and was being as accommodating of their limited time as possible, not entirely out of the goodness of her heart but also not fully because she had something to gain from it.

As promised, she took them to a nearby filming studio, nothing more

than a soundproof room with minimal decor, mainly used for one-on-one or one-on-two interviews between journalist and their guests. Three chairs had been placed next to each other, forming a very wide V shape with one side bigger than the other. This was an interview with a married couple, so it was only right that the ‘couple’ remained together. Opposite the sitting area were a couple of cameras and other filming equipment, which were already being worked on by the staff members tasked with recording the interview.

“Before we start, I’d like to once again thank you for this opportunity,” said the journalist, once again bowing at both of them to express her gratitude. When she straightened her body, she had a big smile on her face. “I never in a million years thought I’d ever get the chance to have a one-on-one exclusive interview with either of you, let alone with both of you shortly after such a big announcement.”

“Yeah, yeah, save all of that blabbering to after we’re done and out of here,” sighed Bakugou, wanting to move on to the actual interview once and for all. “If you’re ready to get started, then let’s just get started.”

“Oh, of course. I wouldn’t want to take up too much of your vacation time,” acknowledged the journalist while nodding her head several times at a very fast pace. “Since this was such a sudden arrangement, it was pretty hard at first to find a good airing slot. But once word about who was being interviewed reached the higher-ups, they magically rearranged the entire airing schedule for today, and you got your premium airing slot for later this morning, right before the lunch-time news starts.”

“I’m sorry you also had to make changes to your schedule at the very last minute,” deadpanned Todoroki, partially relating to the stressful ordeal that must have been.

“The pros far outmatch the cons, so it’s fine, really,” reassured the

journalist. She turned around just a bit and gestured towards the comfortable-looking seats to her left with her hand. “Please, go ahead and take a seat. We can start whenever you’re ready.”

As requested, both Bakugou and Todoroki took a seat on the two chairs placed together, with the journalist joining them a few minutes later. After the cameraman and the rest of their team had finished checking everything and testing how the audio quality was, of course with the participation of those taking part in the interview, they received the green light to get the cameras rolling.

The filming studio fell silent for a couple of seconds, and then the journalist began speaking, officially starting the exclusive interview.

“First things first, I’d like to thank you two, Dynamight, Shouto, for accepting this interview,” said the journalist, sitting next to Bakugou on the shorter side of their V-shaped seating order. “It came as a big surprise, however. You two left perfectly clear that you wouldn’t publicly speak about your relationship and marriage anymore once Monday’s press conference was over. Could I ask what made you change your mind?”

“Yeah, I did say that, but I also said I’m up to cooperating with journalists and reporters who adhere to my strict guidelines on privacy and respect,” explained Bakugou right away, having already come up with his answers ahead of time the previous night. “So if anything, you shouldn’t be thanking me. You should thank yourself for being one of the few respectable journalists around here.”

Right… I’m starting to understand what he meant by ‘it depends on what you consider to be violence’ and the bruised egos comments, remarked Todoroki in the back of his mind as he attentively listened to Bakugou’s answer. His ‘husband’ wasn’t going to wage war on the ‘professional stalkers’ that wouldn’t leave them alone by beating them a pulp; instead, he was going to slaughter them through the power of words. *Given the type of profession they have, this might actually be the*

best method of dealing with them. As expected of Bakugou, he always knows what weakness to exploit to bring someone down to their knees…

"Shouto, you've always been a more approachable pro hero. You even often accept talking with journalists and reporters during your work hours, and occasionally when you're off the clock," continued the journalist, this time approaching Todoroki's side of the story. "But these past few days, you've been refraining from speaking with any of them. Is that because you were together with Dynamight and wanted to respect his privacy preferences, or have you had a change of heart regarding communication with the mass media outside of your working hours?"

"No, not really. They were simply in the way," deadpanned Todoroki without missing a beat. Aside from the initial nonstop doorbell ringing, he wasn't as bothered by the presence of the 'professional stalkers' as Bakugou was. However, if they were in between him and a fun time in the bedroom with his 'husband', of course he was going to ignore them and rush back home.

"Ahaha. I suppose they have been leaving the entrance area of your apartment complex pretty crowded, haven't they?" awkwardly laughed the journalist, not entirely sure how she should interpret those straight-faced words. "Oh! Former apartment complex, I mean. I take it you're already done moving to your new home?"

"Yeah, and this time, we're keeping the address as safely kept as a governmental secret," acknowledged Bakugou, quickly changing his words into a warning. Last but not least, he glanced over at Todoroki, his eyes narrowed into a glare as he emphasized his next question. "Isn't that right?"

"Yeah," said Todoroki, unable to utter anything but that under Bakugou's vicious gaze.

“I’d like to jump right over to your newlywed and cohabiting life, but I’ll keep myself in check until we get a bit more of what preceded your marriage,” chuckled the journalist, finding the way Bakugou had silently chastised Todoroki over his previous doxing incidents to be slightly amusing. “You two have known each other for a long while now. You were both in the same class during your time at UA High School, not to mention you have done several internships together under the wing of former pro hero Endeavor. Was your time as students what nurtured the relationship you have now?”

“I guess?” Todoroki concurred, albeit with a certain hesitation. He threw a quick glance at Bakugou, but since he didn’t seem to be against him speaking about this, Todoroki decided to proceed according to the background history they had come up with for their ‘relationship’. “We were pretty busy back then, as you can imagine, with everything that happened when we were still students. But being a pro hero is also just as time-consuming and dangerous, so I figured that if I were to confess, it would have to be right after our graduation and before we did our official debut as pro heroes.”

“The country was also still in the middle of reconstruction, which brings even more work to the plates of everyone, even those in the hero field,” said the journalist, nodding along very sternly. She quickly switched back to her chipper self with her next question. “If you don’t mind me asking, how did that go? I think I speak for everyone when I say that we’re very curious to know how the confession went and what kind of response you got from Dynamight.”

“Well… I was uncertain about how Ba- I mean, Dynamight was going to react to it, but before I knew it, I had already blurted it out,” explained Todoroki, using his suggestion to get married to each other to solve their individual problems as the base for their ‘confession’ story, as per their agreement. “When he said yes to going out with me, I was a bit surprised at first, but everything just fell into place as time went on.”

“Yes, yes, I can imagine,” agreed the journalist, once again nodding to Todoroki’s storytelling. “Is there anything you want to add to that,

Dynamight?”

“Nope,” said Bakugou shortly and straight to the point.

“I’ll make do with just Shouto’s version, then,” chuckled the journalist, having had the feeling she wouldn’t be getting much out of him regarding this topic because of, you guessed it, his ‘strict guidelines on privacy’. “Anyway, you dated for around three years before you got married, isn’t that right? How did those three years go, and did you have any issues with balancing your relationship while working such a time-consuming and dangerous job?”

“Not really. We quickly figured out what worked the best for both of us,” explained Bakugou as he shrugged his shoulders. “Talking things through before doing anything made it really easy to avoid any problems in the long run. Of course, living in the same apartment complex throughout most of that time also helped. All in all, we kinda ended up reverting to how things were when we lived at UA’s dorms, only with some slight changes.”

“Of course, being dormmates and being a couple are very different things,” acknowledged the journalist with a nod. “I have to say, it was quite smart of you to keep your address a secret throughout these past 3 years, Dynamight. I’m sure you were only able to peacefully enjoy each other's company without any bothersome scandals thanks to that. I’m curious about something, though. How were your dates back then? You were never spotted together outside of your working hours, aside from when you were going out for a meal with other pro heroes of your generation, so does that mean you mostly stayed at either of your apartments?”

“More or less,” replied Todoroki this time around, as he felt quite eager to provide his own opinion on it. “It’s not like we never go anywhere together. We went to the courthouse to get married without any issues or without getting spotted, for example. We’ve also done things like going shopping together and so on. We were just a bit

more careful about it than a regular person. Besides, it's also fun being at home with him, just the two of us. Since we're outside the whole day while working, and we spend so little time at home, it's a nice change of pace."

"Hah! You only say that because you get all your needs catered to while in there," scoffed Bakugou, the words slipping out of his mouth without him noticing, consequences be damned. "You can be your dense, clumsy self without a care in the world with me around to clean up the aftermath."

"Oh, really now? That's quite unexpected," gasped the journalist, equal parts surprised and curious about what she had just heard. None of what he had said had been a part of the pre-planned conversational topics they had agreed on beforehand, but there was no way she would miss such an opportunity - her expectant, sparkly eyes told as much as she intently zeroed in on the pro hero in question.

Ah, crap… Bakugou winced in the back of his mind, already regretting having opened his dumb mouth. He had said what he said more as a knee-jerk reaction to Todoroki's gloating than anything else, but the result was still what it was.

"I never would have thought you're the type who looks after other people, Dynamight," exclaimed the journalist, quite excited about discovering this new facet of someone who was known for being very brash, militant, and overall no-nonsense - definitely not the kind of person who would painstakingly take care of someone else's needs along with their own. "As for Shouto's denseness and clumsiness, well… They do certainly show every now and then, ahaha. Now I'm even more curious about your lifestyle as a couple, especially at your brand-new home."

"Yeah, Ba- I mean, Dynamight is really good at looking after other people," acknowledged Todoroki with a small nod of his head, equally as keen about talking about this little aspect of their lives. Bakugou

did throw him a warning glare and an unspoken order to pipe down, but Todoroki misunderstood it and figured it was because he yet again nearly said the wrong name. “His cooking is delicious, he goes all out with the cleaning, and he’s got the whole place super well organised. You’d think we’ve been paying for cooking and cleaning services, but no, it’s all him keeping everything in order. Oh, and I do help out too. Under his close supervision, obviously.”

“The way you’re bragging about Dynamight really gives this newlywed vibe to the two of you,” chuckled the journalist, both relieved and super stoked she was being allowed to carry on this unplanned conversational topic. “Still, all of these years, millions of people have been fawning over you, Shouto, but by the looks of it, Dynamight was the real catch all along!”

“Sorry, he’s already taken,” deadpanned Todoroki, his face virtually void of any expression and emotion as he grabbed the seat of Bakugou’s chair and dragged them both closer to him.

“Ahahaha! Don’t worry, no one is going to try to steal him from you, Shouto,” laughed the journalist, getting more and more giddy at this gold mine of an interview. So much so that she nearly forgot that the person they were talking about was right there, in between both of them.

“Hey! You’re both crossing a line and you know it, so stop it!” hissed Bakugou, first glaring daggers at the journalist and then redirecting the same level of anger and dissatisfaction to his ‘husband’. Once they quieted down, Bakugou crossed his arms over his chest and kept on sulking. “Geez, I give you an inch and you take the whole freakin’ mile…”

With that sudden admonishment, the conversation between the three of them wound down and returned to its pre-planned course. Since it was a last-minute exclusive interview, the whole thing didn’t go on for even a full 30 minutes. It was still a very productive arrangement for

all three parties, albeit in different senses.

For the journalist, she got an exclusive interview that could very well land her a promotion soon after it aired on her company's news channel.

Bakugou got a successful conclusion to the plan he had created to get rid of the annoying 'professional stalkers' who wouldn't leave the two of them alone.

As for Todoroki… Well, he got to contribute to Bakugou's side of their deal by showing how 'normal' his fake husband was while also rubbing on everyone's faces that this great catch of a man was no longer available in the dating market.

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Meanwhile…

"Damn it, what the hell are they doing at a place like this?" grumbled Enji, binoculars tightly pressed against his upper face as he kept a close watch over the entrance of the skyscraper. "It's been ages since they went inside. This can't be their dating spot, right?"

"Knowing Dynamight, he probably went to complain about all the harassment they've been receiving from all of those journalists, reporters, and paparazzi that were camping in front of their former apartment complex," Burnin pointed out with a dismissive shrug of her shoulders. "He's the type who'd go start a fight with mass media in general out of pure spite and pettiness."

“That would be one heck of a way to start a date…” scoffed Enji, finally putting down the binoculars to give his eyes some rest. He wasn’t one to take any chances, however, so he soon passed them to Burnin so she could continue monitoring the main entrance from the faraway spot down that street where they had momentarily parked their vehicle. “Then again, their marriage is nothing more than a sham. Of course they can’t come up with appropriate dating spots. I bet they wouldn’t even want to go that far in such a public way for the sake of this big farce.”

“Ya think so?” asked Burnin, the binoculars hiding how she rolled her eyes at Enji’s conspiratory claims. “I’d say they are about to have the time of their life. Especially if they no longer have all of those journalists and paparazzi chasing them all over the place. That is, if *you* don’t do anything to try to ruin their date. Isn’t that right, Endeavor?”

“Hmph! I have no intention of personally interacting with them the whole day,” declared Enji with a gruff, begrudging voice. “All I want is to gather evidence that proves I’m right and they’re lying. That will make it easier to convince them to give up on this stupid little scheme before they get themselves in trouble. Shouto doesn’t need such a dumb scandal in his repertoire.”

“You’re still saying that?” sighed Burnin, inwardly shaking her head in disapproval. “What if the opposite ends up happening? Will you finally accept that they are a proper couple and forget this whole ‘I’m gonna make you divorce and then marry the chick I think is right for you, whether you like it or not’ shtick of yours?”

“Hah, as if! There’s no way they can fool me and make me fall for their obvious lies,” snorted Enji, quite confident that he had already won… until some slight doubts started swimming around his mind.

There had been one or two moments the previous day, when Enji went to visit Shouto’s former apartment, that had made him question

quite a lot of things, including his conviction that their marriage was nothing more than a sham. Some things were just impossible to fake, no matter how good an actor someone might be. And neither of them was even an actor to begin with, all the more so his son.

Still, just because they are getting it on and have a bit of a soft spot for each other doesn't mean they are actually in a relationship! Enji proclaimed to his own buttons, deadset in keeping his opinion on the matter as it is, even with these occasional faltering bouts. *This whole date thing will be a clear indicator of where their standing really is. Very few people know they'll be going out today, and they seem to be trying to do away with that crowd of journalists once and for all. That means most people who spot them out and about today will be your random citizen, most of whom aren't so obnoxious about disrupting their outing or invading their privacy. All in all, there's very little incentive for them to play pretend couple while on this so-called date!*

Yes, in Enji's mind, the way his son and Bakugou were going about this 'date' was riddled with holes and weak spots that could be exploited in his favour. With them having no pressing need to pretend non-stop, he was certain they would eventually revert to their actual friendship-based relationship whenever they relaxed or lowered their guard. Those momentary lapses were what Enji was so eagerly looking for as he followed them around from a distance.

I know I told Bakugou he had one month to prove that Shouto can live perfectly fine all on his own, but I'm not one to just sit and wait for something to happen, snickered Enji, his lips slowly morphing into a knowing smirk. *Today is the day I catch them red-handed! You can mark my words!*

Chapter 48

“Oh, there are more people in here than I thought there would be,” marvelled Todoroki as he and Bakugou walked towards the aquarium, both ready to finally start their actual ‘date’. They were surrounded by plenty of people, from families with young children to older couples in all facets of adulthood, making the plaza in front of the aquarium a bustling location.

“It’s an aquarium, of course it’s going to have plenty of people all the time,” pointed out Bakugou while rolling his eyes at that idiotic comment. “Whether it’s the middle of the week or the weekend, they will always have visitors. Most Japanese people might be at work or at school right now, but there are a lot of foreign tourists and other holidaymakers to make up for it.”

“Is that going to be a problem?” asked Todoroki, starting to have some doubts about his date plans. They were supposed to keep a low profile while still being spotted by other people now and then, but with this many visitors around, the likelihood of them being suddenly surrounded by fans was getting uncomfortably high. Todoroki was used to that happening as he did his rounds around town, and Bakugou probably was also the same. However, having that happen during a ‘date’ was a bit…

“I keep telling you it’s fine. I’d rather have a crowd like this than have a group of ‘professional stalkers’ following us around from a distance or whatnot,” reassured Bakugou yet again. “Plus, it’ll be pretty dark inside, right?”

“Well, if you’re okay with it, I’m okay too,” acknowledged Todoroki, relieved at Bakugou’s approval. With how moody and ‘shifty’ his ‘husband’ was, he couldn’t help but feel like the smallest of inconveniences would get Bakugou cancelling their plans. But maybe that was just Todoroki overthinking things and being unusually pessimistic. *I’ve never gone out on a date, so maybe that’s why I’m so*

nervous about it. Bakugou, on the other hand, seems completely fine with all of this.

Did that mean that Bakugou already had some previous dating experiences? No, it couldn't be. Bakugou had made it perfectly clear that he had no interest in pursuing love and romantic relationships. However, that didn't mean he had never gone on a casual date or two with no strings attached.

Todoroki really wanted to ask him about it, but there was no way Bakugou would actually answer his questions. If anything, he probably would twist him around his little finger before providing an ambiguous reply. Such a thought sort of irked Todoroki, even though it was just him wondering about stuff that was technically none of his business.

To soothe himself and push those thoughts away, Todoroki motioned his hand towards Bakugou, but stopped himself shortly after. He was just about to grab the wrong hand by accident. It was a good thing he managed to stop just in time. Todoroki corrected course and moved to the other side, where he could get to the strong, rough hand he was allowed to hold to his heart's content. Bakugou threw him a quick sideways look, but ultimately said nothing about it.

He's finally used to me holding his hand, chuckled Todoroki to his own buttons, a small smile lingering on his lips. Who cared about the few stares and double-takes others were doing for seeing them, two grown men, holding hands without a care in the middle of a crowd. All that mattered was that Bakugou was comfortable doing so - if he wasn't, Todoroki would be receiving yet another scolding right about now. "Bakugou, I think the entrance is over there."

"I know how to read signs, alright?" scoffed Bakugou. As if he needed someone to tell him where to go when it was blatantly clear where was what in such a popular attraction.

With that last bit of bickering, they went to one of the queues forming in front of the ticket counter. The lines moved more slowly than they would have liked, but given the number of visitors, it was unavoidable. Only around twenty minutes later were they leaving the ticket area and moving to the main entrance of the aquarium.

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Meanwhile…

“See? I told you they’d do just fine with their date,” proudly stated Burnin, adjusting the large sunglasses covering the majority of her upper face. She had to listen to Enji complaining all the way there as they carefully shadowed the vehicle they had lent to the couple for the week. But thankfully, the two of them had proved her right by moving to a cliché location as their next dating spot.

“Fine, my ass… We both just saw how Shouto hesitated to hold Bakugou’s hand,” grumbled Enji, using an open newspaper to hide his easily recognisable large frame and scarred face as much as possible. “Is that how someone who has supposedly been dating the other party for over three years would react? I think not!”

“Hmm… Given how finicky Dynamight is… Maybe he has a favourite hand-holding position?” pointed out Burnin, trying to crack that little mystery they had just witnessed from a distance. After thinking about it for a while longer as they walked towards a nearby staff entrance to the aquarium, she suddenly gasped with realisation. “Oh, I know! Wasn’t that the arm he broke a few years ago? Dynamight must have told Shouto to only hold that hand. That way, he can keep his good arm ready for action in case of an emergency! Which is why Shouto stopped when he remembered that, and then went for his other hand! That has to be it!”

“Grrr…” Enji would never say it out loud, but Burnin’s reasoning sounded very much like something Bakugou would do. And with how clumsy his son was in matters unrelated to the pro hero trade, he could also see him making that little mistake time and time again, and then correcting it soon after. *Damn it, I thought I had just gotten a nice piece of evidence against their sham of a marriage, but it ended up being another point scored in their favour…*

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The very first room of the aquarium was akin to an introduction to what they were about to see throughout their visit. Life-size statues of several sea creatures surrounded them from every direction, with a particularly big whale hanging right above their heads. Small aquariums with critters one could find on the coastal areas and rocky beaches also dotted that spacious hall, with some of them being at the perfect height for young children to take a good look at the countless species of animals and aquatic vegetation.

“Some of them really are bigger than they look like on TV and movies, huh…” Todoroki commented under his breath as he peered up to look at the underside of the large whale. He wasn’t quite sure of the name of the species, but there was no doubt that it looked gigantic, even while several meters up in the air. “Makes you think we sure are lucky these guys just stayed in the sea and didn’t evolve into the dry land.”

“Pfft! What’s with that?” snorted Bakugou, the concept of a dry land whale-like creature sounding as crazy as it was funny to his ears. It sure looked like a certain someone needed to brush up on his knowledge of the theory of evolution, as it wasn’t something as simple as it was being described right now. But that was besides the point. “Even if whales had somehow crawled all the way to land without dropping dead soon after, I doubt they’d be able to steal our spot at the top of the food chain.”

“Why is fighting against something or someone and winning always the first thought that crosses your mind?” deadpanned Todoroki, his question more of a comment on Bakugou’s warmongering streak.

“I’m just saying, whether it’s a living being or inanimate, I can beat it without breaking a sweat,” said Bakugou while shrugging his shoulders.

“You’re not going to challenge every single animal in here into a survival championship to decide who’s the king of the aquarium, are you?” asked Todoroki, his words obviously nothing more than a joke, even though his voice had nearly no inflection or tone to it.

“Heh, you better not give me any ideas,” snickered Bakugou. Albeit it couldn’t be seen due to the face mask being used to hide his identity, it was quite obvious through his words alone that his lips were stretched into a mischievous smirk. Had Bakugou not simply continued walking in the same direction as the rest of the visitors, he could have fooled anyone into thinking that he was about to do exactly that with the nearest animal.

Putting the joking intermission aside, Todoroki and Bakugou kept slowly walking through the large aquarium building. They didn’t have any other plans for the morning, so they could afford to take their time in each room. Neither of them had an interest in the sea or animals per se, but as beings of the land, it was fairly fascinating to take a little peek at such foreign habitats and the lives of the creatures that had made them their home.

The first few areas of the aquarium focused on several different habitats divided by environment, ranging from the cold waters of the poles to marshes. One of the rooms even featured sea and river creatures from the Japanese archipelago exclusively, like amago salmons, mudskippers and even a beautifully eerie frilled shark specimen.

The areas that came next became even more specialised, with each one focusing on a specific species. The first one they went into was a two-room exposition on penguins, with the main area dedicated to their spacious home, and the smaller one for the ‘meet-and-greet’ with the little fellows.

By the time Todoroki and Bakugou got to the penguin area, there was an ongoing activity happening for those who wanted to learn more about those funny little creatures and how their caretakers fed them daily. They didn’t want to bother anyone or interrupt anything, so they stayed in the back of the room, quietly listening.

“Thank you very much for coming today. To those who are interested in meeting some of our friendliest penguins, please line up in the next room,” said a staff member, gesturing with her hand to the penguin-shaped door leading to the attached smaller room.

“Oh. Do you want to go meet the penguins too?” asked Todoroki as he watched quite a lot of people, especially those with children, moving to the next room. He was okay with either option, so he left it entirely up to Bakugou.

“No way, that would attract too much attention to us,” Bakugou declined right away. “We’d get caught before we could finish singing the ABC, and for good reason. Can you imagine how explosive it would be on social media if we were spotted interacting with penguins? We only just managed to get rid of those stalker annoyances. I don’t want to have a repeat of that any time soon!”

“I see,” acknowledged Todoroki, slightly disappointed by that answer. He was a little bit curious about how an interaction between Bakugou and the penguins would go - would they view him as some sort of danger due to his volatile personality and strong Quirk, or would they be as friendly and loving as they were while interacting with their

caretakers? As he was wondering about all of that and trying to picture it in his mind, Todoroki ended up noticing a certain detail of what he had just been told. “Oh, so would you want to meet and interact with them if all of these people weren’t here?”

“I mean… Not exactly, but…” mumbled Bakugou with a sulking voice, turning his face slightly so that Todoroki couldn’t keep staring at it and see the indecisiveness in his stance. However, that actually made it seem as if he was longingly gazing at the penguins as they swam and played around in their enclosure.

What a stellar tsundere response, Todoroki told himself in the back of his mind, nodding along in approval of Bakugou’s so-not-honest mumbles. He made a mental note about trying to find some sort of way for them to come visit this aquarium on a day it was closed to the public. Maybe if he talked about it to his connections, Todoroki would be able to book the whole place and see Bakugou interacting with the animals to his heart’s content without later being disturbed by a whole new social media frenzy.

“They’re pretty cute, aren’t they?” said Todoroki, walking up to the balcony-like short wall separating the public from the penguin enclosure.

“In a clumsy, pathetic sort of way, yeah,” agreed Bakugou, albeit with his own tsundere spin to it. Seeing the penguins walking around on the ice and rocks as they went about their day soon got him laughing a little bit. Todoroki tilted his head at it in a puzzled manner, to which Bakugou dismissively answered. “The way they waddle is so damn similar to how you were walking some days ago while carrying me to your sofa.”

“Oh, now that you mention it…” noted Todoroki as he recalled that specific moment. Bakugou had certainly been pretty amused by it back then, just like how he seemed to be with the way the penguins ‘waddled’. Looking at his face and the non-existence of his trademark

frown, it was quite obvious that he was smiling behind his face mask right now. *Ah, but I can't see his smile this way…*

Without wasting a single second more thinking about it, Todoroki half-turned his body so he'd be facing Bakugou and then grabbed and gave a little tug at the bottom half of his face mask. Once it was pulled down to his chin, Todoroki got to see that smile he was seeking, even if it only lasted for a fraction of a second longer. After that, it transformed into an angry scowl that was partially disabled when Todoroki leaned forward and sideways to kiss him.

"Wha-!?" yelped Bakugou, the suddenness of it all making his face explode into a myriad of shades of red instantly. He hurried to pull his face mask back up, but his brain was so frazzled at the moment that all his hands could come up with were very awkward and stiff movements that made him take twice as long to cover his blushing features.

Yeah, his reactions keep getting better and better, Todoroki commented on the back of his mind, his heart doing some sort of happy somersault inside his chest. He didn't even mind the fact that he was 100% getting told off for this surprise kiss once they were no longer in public. The 'reward' he had gotten out of this risky manoeuvre far outshone the incoming repercussions.

Todoroki's only problem - if it could even be called such - was that his perception of Bakugou's cuteness escalated in equal proportion to his adorable reactions. That wouldn't have been that big of an issue had he not struggled so much with maintaining his self-control. With each reaction being cuter than the previous one, it was getting harder and harder for Todoroki to restrain himself to just one kiss at a time. Their little kissing session during breakfast was a good example of Todoroki failing to do exactly that.

If we're at home, it's fine, but while we're out in public or working, it's a bit… Yeah, this mission is going to be pretty rough on me from now on,

Todoroki sighed to himself, closely following Bakugou as he moved to the next area - this time dedicated to jellyfish. *Wait, this place is…*

The room they had gone into was more of a corridor, with a floor-to-ceiling tank filled with two different species of jellyfish on either side. To accentuate the fluttering, white form of the drifting jellyfish, the lights had been turned down to a bare minimum. There was a path delineated with round floor lights that led to the next area and a few dim lights inside the jellyfish tanks, but that was about it for illumination. In addition, since it was the gateway between two very popular areas, most people didn't stick around for very long.

That dimly lit setting was perfect for a bit more privacy, as far as Todoroki was concerned.

"Bakugou," called Todoroki, seeking to gain his attention from the jellyfish tanks. Once Bakugou was begrudgingly glancing his way, Todoroki pulled the two of them aside to one of the corners of the small corridor. That way, no matter what they did, they wouldn't get in anyone's way.

"Hey!" yelped Bakugou with a hushed voice the moment Todoroki once again yanked down his face mask. He was about to ask him a growled, 'What's your deal?', but Todoroki's hands moved faster than Bakugou's mouth.

"You're still all red and warm here," chuckled Todoroki as he cupped Bakugou's blushing cheeks with both hands. Having a face mask on during the summertime probably contributed to some of it, but Todoroki liked to believe that he and the kiss had been the main factor for that redness. *Oh…*

Just as he said that, Todoroki saw Bakugou scrunching up his face into a pouty frown, followed by the sensation of his cheeks getting just a

smidge hotter. He so wanted to pinch his cheeks like Bakugou usually did with him. That sugary sweet temptation was only second to his urge to make his face even redder and hotter. Todoroki already knew all the best ways to do so, and with them out of the way and with just a tiny bit of privacy, what was stopping him from going for it?

Todoroki wasn't one to wait after making up his mind about something, and he proved that by not giving a damn about kissing Bakugou right there and then one more time. He used his hands to keep Bakugou's face at just the perfect angle for that kiss, with no back pain for either of them involved this time around. Of course, Todoroki was aware of how high-risk doing something like that in a place like this was - he didn't want them to get called out or persecuted for their public displays of affection, and neither did he want random people to get a good eyeful of how adorable Bakugou looked whenever they kissed. To protect their privacy just a bit more, Todoroki pressed Bakugou's back against the little corner they were at, using his body to shield them from any curious onlookers.

As soon as they had gotten to that point and Todoroki could drop his guard somewhat, he went all out with the kiss, deepening it by slipping his tongue inside Bakugou's mouth. There was some squirming around at first, but Bakugou settled down once they went over the 1-minute mark. That meant Todoroki was no longer at risk of getting punched or headbutted into oblivion… for now, at least.

"Haa… I'm gonna kill you once we're back home…" gasped Bakugou once he got a chance to speak during a small pause.

"Yeah…" halfheartedly replied Todoroki, far too focused on those delicious lips to fully listen to what they were saying. He went for a second round right afterwards, one of his hands dropping to Bakugou's waist while his remaining hand slid up his face until his fingers could lightly touch his earlobe. Just like the rest of Bakugou's face, it felt so very warm to the touch. Todoroki was pretty limited in his options, but it was within possibility for him to lightly grab and squeeze Bakugou's soft, fleshy earlobe with his index finger and thumb. He could feel Bakugou fidgeting all over again each time he

squeezed or rubbed it. *I so want to try to lick and bite it some more…*

But alas, Todoroki obviously could not do that inside an aquarium filled with kids and people of all walks of life. Even kissing him like this was going a bit over the line of what was safe to do in public. For as much as it pained him to do so, Todoroki had to stop at just this, before either (or both) of them got a bit too into it.

“Sorry, Bakugou. I couldn’t help it,” apologised Todoroki, already falling victim to one of his ‘husband’s’ begrudging pouty glares. Bakugou’s cheekbones were even redder than before, making their darker colouring visible even in that very dim lighting.

“Get ready to camp outside until the end of summer…” grumbled Bakugou, taking a hold of Todoroki’s cheek and pinching it hard before he started yanking and pulling at it. “Even those waddling fuglies have more self-control than you…”

“Sho’y,” Todoroki apologised a second time, the painful pinching the only thing stopping him from laughing at Bakugou’s description of penguins. Once Bakugou let go with a click of his tongue, Todoroki rubbed his reddish cheek a bit while leaning closer to ask in a hushed voice, “Do you need to take a little break before we move on to the next area?”

“What do you think!?” hissed Bakugou, his brows getting even more scrunched. There was no way he could show his current face to anyone else right now, even with a face mask on. Bakugou let out a huffy scoff and let his face drop on top of Todoroki’s shoulder, seeking to use it as his hiding spot until he was presentable enough to be out in public.

Todoroki simply chuckled at it and briefly patted Bakugou’s head with his hand. Since he was the one and only culprit for this kissing

incident, it was only fair that he took responsibility for his actions. They had plenty of time to spare today, so Bakugou could enjoy his little break against his shoulder for as long as he wanted.

Oh, right. I've been so focused on kissing Bakugou that I completely forgot about this area, Todoroki suddenly remembered. The jellyfish corridor had been such a big help in getting some good snogging. It would be extremely rude of him not to do it justice by enjoying, for a while, the jellyfish calmly floating around in the two tanks.

Aside from some minute differences in appearance, the two species of jellyfish simply looked like jellyfish to Todoroki. The ones on the tank right next to them had long, frilly tentacles, giving them a very fancy appearance. It was the kind of jellyfish he had never seen in the wild. The jellyfish on the opposite tank, however, were more in line with the image Todoroki had of those squishy but prickly animals.

Oh. As Todoroki was peacefully running his eyes through that second tank, he ended up making eye contact with another visitor. By the looks of it, they had gotten caught red-handed yet again, the way the young woman got all flustered. It was an unavoidable situation, seeing as both of them were popular public figures out and about in a packed aquarium.

Nevertheless, Todoroki was counting on the goodness of their fans' hearts to keep their current location on the down-low. He brought his index finger to his lips and asked her to keep this a secret. Fortunately, the young woman zealously nodded her head a couple of times in acquiescence to that small favour. To offer his gratitude, Todoroki silently mouthed a 'thank you' at her, to which she responded with a slight bow before she moved on with her visit to the aquarium alongside the young man she had come with (who had been too fascinated by the jellyfish to notice them).

We sure are lucky about the people who end up spotting us, sighed Todoroki in the back of his mind, returning his focus to Bakugou as he

calmly waited for him to recompose himself. *Had it been a certain someone, I bet he'd be freaking out right about now…*

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Meanwhile, part 2…

"....."

"You know, they for sure exude newlywed energy. Like, hot damn, the balls of these two," said Burnin, nodding to herself as she kept her eyes fixed on one of the monitors of the aquarium's surveillance system. Thanks to their status as licensed pro heroes, it was easy to convince the staff members and security guards to let them in and use their surveillance system to continue monitoring the two individuals they were currently following. They were a bit apprehensive at first, rightfully so, but Burnin reassured them that no one was in danger and that this was nothing more than a surprise training drill. So here she was with Enji, following the target couple as they walked around the aquarium through the surveillance cameras. "I'm starting to realise that them keeping their relationship all hush-hush for a few years was one hell of a miracle. They couldn't be more obvious about it if they tried!"

"T-They have to be doing this on purpose…!" yelped Enji at long last, his sidekick's words jolting him out of his flabbergasted stupor.

"They have no idea we're following them. Why the heck would they be making out in public for any reason other than them wanting to make out, TPO be damned?" pointed out Burnin while inwardly sighing. If the son had balls of steel, then the father had a stubborn streak just as strong and durable.

“That’s… well… um…” mumbled Enji, wracking his brain trying to come up with an explanation that differed from Burnin’s very persuasive version of the unfolding event. He also couldn’t use the journalists and paparazzi following them as the reason behind it, as they had managed to evade them yesterday while moving to their new apartment. In the end, Enji came out of it completely empty-handed, although not entirely ready to give up on his belief that his son and Bakugou were faking everything.

“That’s what I thought,” snorted Burnin, satisfied with Enji’s current silence. “Welp, I think that’s about it. It’s more than clear that they are on an honest-to-god date right now. I say we pack our stuff and return to the hero agency.”

“But-”

“Hey, if you want to continue following them around, go for it,” said Burnin, cutting off Enji in the process. She raised both of her hands in surrender while shaking her head. “But I don’t necessarily want to spend a whole day being reminded of how single I am, ya know? Plus, are you sure you want to risk getting Shouto even angrier at you than he already is? ‘Cuz I bet he’s gonna riot the moment he discovers you’ve been following them all morning long, and then even spied on them while they were playing tonsil hockey with each other.”

“C-Can’t you use less crass words as a descriptive!?” roared Enji while banging his prosthetic hand on the desk by the monitors. Despite the angry tone of his voice, he seemed to be more embarrassed than actually furious at his sidekick’s blunt wording. Enji cleared his throat in an attempt at both calming himself down and steering the conversation back on track. “Anyway! I still haven’t gathered the evidence I’m looking for, so yes, you will have to endure this surveillance mission for a while longer.”

“Whaaaat? Are you for real?” groaned Burnin, her shoulders dropping despondently. “Why are you obsessing over that conspiracy theory of

yours when it's so darn obvious they are into each other? I mean, sure, I get it, it must have hurt your feelings that Shouto kept their relationship a secret from you this whole time. But look at them! All the telltale signs of a through-and-through romantic relationship are right there, currently being showcased on that screen! Or what, do you seriously think the two of them are the type to randomly grab someone, take them on a date and then just eat each other's faces next to a crapton of jellyfish?"

"Grrrr…" Once again, Enji was rendered speechless, unable to come up with a single reason to support his suspicions. After all, Burnin was right in everything she was saying: they were making it painfully obvious they were married to each other. Enji's pigheaded suspicion was solemnly based on a hunch, plus his refusal to believe their conveniently placed marriage announcement was not part of an elaborate plan for Shouto to turn down any future arranged marriage offers.

Enji obviously couldn't tell why Bakugou had been willing to help Todoroki with such a silly plan. They were friends, yes, but Shouto had a much closer-knit group of friends that didn't include Bakugou, and vice versa. Enji had no idea of how and why his son had managed to rope Bakugou into this, but whatever the reason might be, it was undeniable that he had been the right pick for it, given how compatible they seemingly were.

"I just find all of this to be too convenient to be real," grumbled Enji, arms crossed over his chest. "My son is a terrible liar. He'd never be able to keep a secret this big from me for this long. Even if Bakugou is pretty good at everything he does, there's just no way for him to transfer those skills to Shouto. As such, this can only be his way of trying to get out of an arranged marriage that would only benefit him and his pro hero career."

"Seriously, just how stubborn can you be…" sighed Burnin, sympathising quite a lot with the two young pro heroes. It couldn't be easy to be the outlet of such unreasonable and unfounded suspicions… "Fine, we can stick around for a little while longer. But just for the

record, I'm on their side. If seeing them being all lovey-dovey with each other will finally convince you they are in a true romantic relationship, I guess I'm willing to make this day-long sacrifice for their sake."

"Hmph! As if! They've been lucky so far, but I'm sure they will soon accidentally drop their act!" scoffed Enji, turning back around to continue following his son and Bakugou through the surveillance cameras.

"Yes, yes, whatever makes you sleep better at night," said Burnin with a dismissive tone. Part of her wanted to text her fellow coworker and warn him of his father's 'surveillance', but she decided against it in the end. *If they remain unaware we're following them but continue being the poster image of a happy married couple, maybe that will help Endeavor finally acknowledge the truth. 'Cuz oh boy, is this man balls deep in some strong denial juice…*

Chapter 49

After a considerably lengthy break at the jellyfish ‘corridor’, Todoroki and Bakugou resumed their fake date at the aquarium. One after another, they visited each and every area of the latter half of the large attraction, with their average time spent at each one varying immensely depending on the animal it focused on.

They arrived just in time for a little show at the sea lions arena, which got them sitting down to watch the energetic animals showing off their entertainment skills in the most varied ways. Obviously, there wasn’t a ‘meet and greet’ with them, but it was possible to feed them some treats once the event was over. Much like it happened with the penguins, they refrained from participating in that final act of the event, as it would place too much attention on their hidden identities.

In the end, Todoroki accumulated all sorts of reasons to bring Bakugou there a second time, if only so he could fill in the wide gaps they had left behind due to needing to keep their discretion. He was so very curious about what a friendly encounter between his ‘husband’ and a semi- or aquatic animal would look like, and there was only one way to satiate it - to get Bakugou finally meeting those animals.

It wasn’t going to be easy, especially once they returned to their regular work schedules. But if there was one thing that Todoroki had learned throughout the years, it was that ‘if there was a will, there was a way’. And oh boy, was he dead set on finding that exact way to visit that aquarium in a day without any other visitors.

That fervent desire left Todoroki exponentially more excited about this first visit, as he wanted to find all the ideal spots and creatures to make that next visit even better. Which meant he spent a lot - and by a lot, it meant A LOT - of time paying very close attention to Bakugou. How else would Todoroki figure out which animals his tsundere ‘husband’ would get all giddy about? Bakugou would never openly tell him about it, no matter how much he begged him to, that’s for sure.

But, as expected, all of that attention came with a noteworthy disadvantage. Or more like, the mix of Todoroki closely watching Bakugou and his previous actions resulted in a not-so-unforeseen outcome…

Bakugou had been on his guard ever since their 'jellyfish tryst'.

Watching Bakugou that closely led Todoroki to catch quite a lot of endearing reactions and moments right as they were happening. And, for better or worse, he was getting weaker and weaker against said reactions and moments. As soon as he caught a whiff of them, Todoroki was compelled to kiss Bakugou without a second thought…

If Bakugou actually let him, that is.

With him on his guard, all of those kissing attempts had the same ending time and time again: one of Todoroki's cheeks got pinched and then pulled away from anywhere close to Bakugou's mouth.

Bakugou didn't yell at him or rebuke him in any way or shape, however. That cheek pinching and a silent glare were all he did about Todoroki's impulsive kissing attempts.

The first couple of times that happened, Todoroki felt slightly miffed about it. What was so wrong about a 'married couple' kissing a couple of times while out on a 'date'? Plenty of other couples were getting all lovey-dovey as they enjoyed their time at the aquarium. Todoroki saw no problem in acting the same way with Bakugou. But, after a while, that annoyance started changing into something a bit more amusing. He started to wonder how many attempts it would take for Bakugou to finally give up on ruining his plans. Knowing Bakugou, it would definitely take a long while… and Todoroki wasn't wrong about that.

By the time they concluded their visit to the aquarium, a bit over 2 hours after they had arrived there, he had yet to successfully kiss Bakugou a third time. In any other circumstances, Todoroki would be pouting about it. But right now, he was more amazed at Bakugou's stubborn consistency than bothered by it.

He truly is a tough opponent, even when it comes to kisses, concluded Todoroki in the back of his mind as they emerged through the same entrance area they had used to go inside the aquarium.

As a couple of hours had passed by, they were greeted by the sun at its highest point, signalling that lunch time was right around the corner. It also meant the first part of their 'date' was over, and they could move on to the second part - a meal at a restaurant of Bakugou's choosing.

"Have you already decided which restaurant you want to try out?" asked Todoroki, putting back his sunglasses to better hide his easily recognisable features while in the bright outdoors.

"Yeah, there's one within walking distance from here," said Bakugou, already in the process of grabbing his smartphone from his pants' pocket. He opened the map app and went to the bookmarked category, where he easily found the name and location of the restaurant in question. "It's nothing too fancy, so we can just walk in without making a reservation first."

"Okay, sure. That sounds perfect," acknowledged Todoroki after taking a quick peek at Bakugou's phone. Even though they had their own vehicle to take them to places, it was just easier to move around by walking. Parking spots weren't exactly easy to come by around popular attractions, even during a weekday. They had been lucky in finding one relatively fast and relatively close to the aquarium, but if they could just walk to the next dating spot, it would simply be faster

to do so than to begin the search for a new parking spot all over again. “Do you have a dish in particular you want to try out, or are you good with whatever?”

“It’s not a dish per se. They do these meal sets during lunchtime that are famous for being pretty harmonious and complementary,” Bakugou explained while browsing through the photos available in the map app. Once he found one of those meal sets, he passed his smartphone to Todoroki. “You wouldn’t think those dishes would be a good fit together, right? But, apparently, they work really well. So I’ve been curious about how exactly they’ve been creating these sets.”

“Sounds about right for your domestic and culinary skills,” deadpanned Todoroki. The first words that had come to mind were actually ‘domestic fairy’, but he knew from personal experience what would happen to him if he called Bakugou that. Some of their former classmates had learned that lesson the hard way, while Todoroki simply watched from afar the terrifying consequences.

“So what if I want to eat well every single meal?” scoffed Bakugou, trying to diminish the impact those two skills of his had on his pick for a restaurant. “My body is my most important work tool. Of course I’m gonna go out of my way to keep it in the most pristine, optimal condition, whether I’m working or on holiday.”

“I wasn’t necessarily complaining about it,” chuckled Todoroki as he motioned his hand to the side and grabbed Bakugou’s. “You can lead the way.”

“Grrr…” Bakugou threw a moody glare at Todoroki due to the smooth capture of his hand, but he quickly decided to dismiss it for the time being. It was still early in the lunchtime period, and he wanted to use that to their benefit. It would suck if their mealtime was interrupted because they were spotted together in the restaurant by either fans or those sneaky little stalkers. But if they got there before the peak of the lunchtime hustle and bustle, they might be able to enjoy a relatively

peaceful meal.

Plus, they were getting closer and closer to the time slot in which their interview was scheduled to air on TV. Bakugou was the one who planned all of that, so he obviously had taken into consideration the impact it would have, not only to them, but also to everyone and everything else. They and their marriage announcement would be trending all over again on social media, and the most pigheaded paparazzi would hunt them down like hungry hounds all over again. As far as Bakugou was concerned, these might very well be the last minutes of peace and quiet they'd have for the next 24 hours or so.

From the aquarium, it only took them around 15 minutes of walking until they reached the restaurant in question. It was located on the first floor of an otherwise residential building, which gave it a prime location to always have customers around. But since the two of them got there pretty early, there were still plenty of available tables.

They asked the waitress who welcomed them at the door if they could take a seat at a table that would give them a certain level of privacy. The waitress, having immediately recognised the two of them the moment Todoroki removed his sunglasses and Bakugou his face mask, promptly guided them to a table closer to the back of the restaurant. Some potted plants and movable partitions created something akin to a private room, which sounded just right for their current needs.

Once they were seated, the waitress happily moved about to provide them with a warm, wet towel to wipe their hands, glasses of cold water, and, last but definitely not least, the menus. She then left the two of them alone so they could choose what they wanted to order for their lunch.

"Oh. They have a surprisingly large number of different meal sets," pointed out Todoroki as he ran his eyes through the menu. The restaurant was a Japanese-cuisine establishment that focused on the Ichiju Sansai meal preparation method, something he wasn't all that

familiar with in theory, but was very well acquainted with in practice since childhood. The Todoroki Abode had always had someone there preparing healthy, nutritious food for the entire family, first by his mother and a caretaker, and later on by his older sister. Todoroki lowered the menu back to the table and asked, “Which one are you interested in?”

“All of them, but ordering that much food would be insane,” sighed Bakugou, thinking round and round as he tried to figure out which meal set would be the best for his ‘culinary research’. He had eaten most of the dishes featured in the meal sets, but the individual dishes themselves weren’t what he was interested in - he was seeking the secret behind that ‘harmonious combo’ that had become the restaurant’s main selling point.

“You know you can come back here some other day to try out different meal sets, right?” said Todoroki, an eyebrow slightly arched at his ‘husband’s’ uncharacteristic indecisiveness.

“Oh, silly me. Why didn’t I think of that before?” sarcastically scoffed Bakugou while rolling his eyes at Todoroki’s obnoxiously obvious comment. “This place is in the opposite direction from the areas I’m usually at. It would be a waste of my already short lunch break to come all the way here, and when they are at their busiest, at that.”

“Then… During your day off from work?” suggested Todoroki, even though he was yet again spelling out the most obvious alternative.

“Again, I don’t usually come to this area of our city,” groaned Bakugou, finding the fact that he had to repeat himself beyond annoying. “Plus, I have better things to do with my free time. Like, I don’t know, catching those lunatics.”

“Oh, right. That’s true,” acknowledged Todoroki with a small nod of

his head. These past few days had been so busy but fun that he had completely put the villain group trying to headhunt Bakugou on the back burner. Now that their house move was complete, and his side of their deal was moving forward at a slow but steady pace, it was probably time for them to focus some of their attention on Bakugou's main issue. "Well, food is food for me, and you're the one with an interest in this restaurant. I don't mind ordering a meal set that is completely different from yours and then sharing some of it with you. That way, you'd be trying two sets in one visit, right?"

"I mean, yeah, but…" grumbled Bakugou under his breath, his words trailing off halfway through his vague reply. He was hesitant to say yes at first, but after rethinking the whole offer, he figured, why refuse it? "Hmph! Do whatever you want."

"Okay, I will," said Todoroki, pleasantly surprised that Bakugou agreed to it without too much arguing. Was he actually that interested in this restaurant? That in itself also came as a surprise to Todoroki. Bakugou wasn't exactly the type to be interested in anything unrelated to his job as a pro hero. *I guess he, too, has grown up somewhat since we graduated.*

Todoroki patiently waited for Bakugou to make up his mind about his meal set, and only then did he choose his own, to make sure none of the dishes featured in it was the same as Bakugou's. Once they were ready to order, they pressed the call button on top of the table and waited just a little bit for the same waitress to appear and jot down their meal sets.

As was to be expected of a restaurant in Japan, their food arrived at their table in no time. The waitress brought one meal set at a time with her tray, putting each dish in its intended spot in front of them at the table. Then it was their beverage's turn, which came accompanied by two glasses filled with ice cubes. Soon after that, it was just the two of them once again.

“They both look pretty good,” commented Todoroki as he grabbed the disposable chopsticks and offered his thanks for that meal. In his case, the main dish was grilled salted salmon, which came accompanied by simmered fried tofu and greens, a mini salad with lettuce and tomato, miso soup with tofu and wakame, a rice bowl with black sesame seeds sprinkled on top and a small plate with pickled daikon radish. Given their circumstances, it wasn’t advisable to drink anything alcoholic, so he asked for whatever fruit juice they had at the moment, which turned out to be a refreshing mix of mango and orange.

“Of course they do. Restaurants need to make their dishes look appetising, or no one will want to eat them,” Bakugou pointed out with a dismissive shrug of his shoulders. He, too, was already separating his chopsticks in anticipation of diving right into his meal set. Unlike Todoroki, his main dish was stir-fried mushrooms and eggs, accompanied by chrysanthemum greens and tofu salad, a small serving of nikujaga, clam miso soup, plain white rice and a small plate of the same pickles. He also asked for the same fruit juice as Todoroki, which was why the waitress had brought a small jug of the mango and orange juice alongside their iced glasses.

“I still think your food is better, though,” added Todoroki after just a single bite of his salmon. One would think that a well-trained chef working in a restaurant would make better food than someone who learned how to cook as just another skill for a healthy lifestyle, but Bakugou proved that otherwise. There was just something about his home-cooked meals that topped anything a restaurant could ever dish out - or at the very least, that was Todoroki’s and his taste buds’ overall evaluation.

“Grrr… Of course it is! Who do you think I am?” Despite the growling and the scrunched-up frown on his face, Bakugou was actually pretty happy to hear that his food was better than a pro’s. If he was going to cook for someone else daily, the bare minimum that someone could do was praise him for the three-star restaurant treatment they were getting. All the more so since Bakugou didn’t particularly like to share his home-cooked meals with others. In his eyes, he had worked pretty hard to acquire god-level cooking skills; why should someone who didn’t put in the work get to enjoy the results? But, as usual, Todoroki

ended up becoming the exception to that rule. *Well, he's putting in some work to eventually learn how to cook on his own. Eating my food now should become a good reference once he goes from observing only to trying to cook them himself.*

"No, I'm being serious," said Todoroki, misunderstanding Bakugou's cranky response as him not believing his words. "This salmon here is pretty good. It's your standard salted salmon, which you can find just about anywhere in the country. But the salmon you cooked yesterday for our breakfast was so much better. Did you use anything different when making it?"

"It's salted salmon. The only ingredients are literally salt *and* salmon," sighed Bakugou, feeling slightly exasperated at Todoroki's lack of knowledge on such a simple dish.

"Hmm… Then maybe it's the type of salt you use?" Todoroki wondered out loud while munching on a piece of fried tofu.

"I use regular kosher salt. The one that is constantly on those time sales at the grocery store," said Bakugou, once again debunking Todoroki's theory. In his cooking, there wasn't any special technique or ingredient per se - he had simply mastered every single basic cooking technique and slowly perfected each dish that he cooked regularly so that it fully matched his taste. Besides, their taste in food couldn't be further apart, with Bakugou favouring spicy food and Todoroki preferring cold, simpler foods, like cold soba, so it wasn't that he had accidentally been cooking according to his 'husband's' preference either.

"In that case, I wonder what it could be…" mumbled Todoroki, his curiosity piqued to the point he couldn't stop thinking about it. He had only eaten Bakugou's home-cooked food a couple of times since they began their unofficial mission, but he still had a feeling that this meal set he was currently eating would have tasted so much better if Bakugou had been the one making it. He couldn't explain why or back

it up with some sort of evidence; he just felt like that would be the case. Todoroki was motioning his chopsticks towards the salmon once again when he suddenly brought his hand to a stop. “Oh, right. I almost forgot.”

“What now?” grumbled Bakugou, lifting his gaze back to Todoroki while chewing a juicy slice of the beef in the nikujaga stew.

“Here you go,” said Todoroki as he tore and grabbed a piece of his salmon with the chopsticks and then motioned it closer to Bakugou’s face.

“...Huh?” blurted out Bakugou, reflexively pulling his face away from Todoroki’s chopsticks.

“I told you I’d let you taste my meal set so you could research two of them in one go, right?” Todoroki reminded Bakugou, inching his chopsticks and the piece of salmon held in their middle closer to his ‘husband’s’ mouth once again. “Here’s a bit of the salted salmon. I also kinda want to know if you can taste the difference between yours and this restaurant’s, too.”

“I can grab a few bites out of your food on my own, thank you very much,” scoffed Bakugou, pushing Todoroki’s hand to the side with the back of his chopstick-holding hand.

“I already grabbed this one for you, so just eat it,” deadpanned Todoroki, moving his hand and arm back to their previous position, albeit this time even closer to Bakugou’s face. The table they were sitting at was meant for two people only, and they were sitting in front of each other - that really aided Todoroki in being able to share his food with Bakugou without much struggle - if Bakugou cooperated, of course. “I was careful when selecting this piece. You don’t have to worry about any fishbones.”

“That’s not the problem here!” hissed Bakugou, keeping his voice down to not arouse the interest of the waiting staff or the other customers.

“What’s the problem, then?” asked Todoroki, his head slightly tilted to the left. He actually did have a suspicion of what said ‘problem’ was, but he wanted to hear it straight out of Bakugou’s mouth. Mostly because it sounded like fun.

“Grr… You know very well what the problem is!” growled Bakugou, his brow already twitching with repressed anger. “Don’t think I can’t see through that ‘innocent’ head tilt of yours!”

“We’re a ‘couple’, Bakugou. I don’t think I’m doing anything that outlandish,” pointed out Todoroki, giving up on playing dumb after being called out on it. “Besides, this table is mostly blocked from view. No one will notice I’m feeding you.”

“Like I care!” Bakugou retorted with a scoff. “Even if no one sees it, I will! So get those chopsticks out of my face before I make you swa-Mmgh!!!”

“What do you think of the salmon?” asked Todoroki after having ignored everything coming out of Bakugou’s mouth and instead shoving the piece of salmon into it. He did it a whole lot more gently than Bakugou had previously done when he asked to taste-test his cooking.

“Get ready to learn how to swallow chunks of wood,” hissed Bakugou, already cracking his knuckles in preparation for doing as promised and force-feeding those chopsticks down Todoroki’s throat. He was about to yank the chopsticks out of Todoroki’s hand when both of

their phones started beeping and vibrating at the same time.

Years of working as pro heroes had trained them to react right away to any message or incoming phone call they received, as it could very well be an emergency dispatch. Hence, Bakugou had to dismiss his petty revenge in favour of going to check what exactly had interrupted him.

Well, much like the latest times, he should not have, as the reason for that disturbance was a few new messages in their former class's group chat.

[Kaminari] *(See attached video)*

[Kaminari] *Sorry, he's already taken LMAO*

[Sero] *Sorry, he's already taken lolololol*

[Ashido] *SoRrY, hE's AlReAdY tAkEn! XD*

[Mineta] *HOW THE MIGHTY IKEMEN HAS FALLEN LOLOLOLOLOLOL*

[Kaminari] *This is 100% gonna become a new catchphrase around here*

[Asui] *So long as you're willing to get killed the next time you see Bakugou-chan*

[Sero] *Nah, he's too busy living the newlywed life to bother with us, mere*

mortals

[Midoriya] *Um… Sorry to burst your bubble, Sero-kun, but Kacchan will definitely find the time to kill you…*

[Midoriya] *Actually, never mind. You didn't see me here, and I didn't see anything either…*

[Jirou] *Whether you say or see anything or not, you're still going to get dragged into the incoming torture session ¯_(ツ)_/¯*

[Midoriya] *True OTL*

"Today's murder list has just gotten bigger…" grumbled Bakugou, locking his smartphone's screen with a very aggressive button pressing.

"They don't mean any harm by it," sighed Todoroki, very much relieved that they wouldn't have to shorten their 'date' due to an emergency. "We didn't warn them about the interview beforehand. Of course they'll be taken aback by it. You do hate associating yourself with the press, after all."

"They can be taken aback in silence!" snarled Bakugou, grabbing his glass of iced fruit juice to help him push down the annoyance he felt towards those goofy morons. As he was drinking the juice, his smartphone beeped and vibrated against his hand one more time. Thinking that he'd be adding one more name to his proverbial murder list, Bakugou went to check the incoming text… only to spit out most of the juice. "Pfffft! Cough, cough!"

“What’s wrong?” asked Todoroki, an eyebrow slightly arched at Bakugou’s out-of-character sputtering and coughing fit. He hadn’t received any additional messages from the group chat, so the one Bakugou had just gotten must have been directly for him.

“Cough… I fuckin’ hate this mission so damn much…” groaned Bakugou, his voice still slightly rougher due to nearly choking on the juice. Once he had calmed down a bit, he unlocked his phone again and went to reply to the text message.

[Old Hag] *Just watched your little interview. Are you sure you two aren’t married for real?*

[Katsuki] *WHY THE HELL WOULD I MARRY THAT DENSE MORON FOR REAL!?*

[Katsuki] *The whole interview was staged with the help of that journalist!*

[Katsuki] *Stop creating stupid fairytales in your head and let us work on this mission in peace and quiet!*

[Old Hag] *Heh, defensive much?*

[Katsuki] *GO. AWAY!!!!!*

“Ugh, why is everyone around me such annoying little shits who don’t know when to keep stupid thoughts as just thoughts…?” grumbled Bakugou under his breath as he once again locked his smartphone and placed it back inside his pocket.

“You never answered my question,” pointed out Todoroki, reminding Bakugou that he still hadn’t told him who had sent him that last message and why he had reacted like that to it.

“My old hag is going senile, that’s what happened,” grumbled Bakugou, spitting out each word with as much indignation as he had felt while replying to his mother’s messages.

“She sounded just fine when I spoke with her,” said Todoroki, indecisive about whether Bakugou had meant that hissy comment for real or if he was just taking his anger out on someone.

“No, no, she’s definitely going crazy or some shit. That’s the only explanation for- Mmgh…!” Just as Bakugou moved forward with some more bitching and grumbling, he was yet again surprised with one more bite out of Todoroki’s meal set - by the taste of it, he had just been fed a piece of the fried tofu. Bakugou unwillingly chewed it while glaring daggers at Todoroki. “Grrr… You really have a death wish, don’t you?”

“What do you think of the simmered fried tofu and greens?” asked Todoroki, once again ignoring Bakugou’s moody question. “I think it could use a bit more salt as it is, but as a side dish to the rest of this meal set, it goes pretty well with the salted salmon.”

“Stop ignoring me, damn it!” Bakugou barked back, his vexation only getting worse and worse.

In response to it, Todoroki kept on ignoring his bad mood and once again picked more food from his meal set with his chopsticks - a bit of the salad this time around. He then calmly motioned it towards Bakugou, obviously intending to feed it to him.

Usually, this was the point where Bakugou's patience was completely depleted and he started raging, creating victims and damage all around him, sometimes even dragging those who were completely unrelated to his moody explosion into it.

However, much to Todoroki's amazement, Bakugou glared at him for a little while longer and then did the unthinkable… He actually ate the salad without Todoroki having to shove it into his mouth!

"Now you're out of things to give me," grumbled Bakugou, picking up where he had left off with his own meal after one last sullen 'hmph'.

"You haven't tried my miso soup yet, though," noted Todoroki, his heterochromatic eyes unable to tear themselves away from Bakugou's tempestuous cuteness even as he moved his chopsticks towards the miso soup bowl. He had just thought that sitting in front of Bakugou was super convenient for this type of 'romantic activity', but now he was starting to think that it was kind of getting in the way. It would be really hard to kiss Bakugou with a table in between them, after all.

"Heh, good luck giving it to me with your chopsticks," snickered Bakugou, a small smirk finally making its way to his lips. He made a show out of moving his hand towards Todoroki's meal set and grabbed the bowl in front of him, taking a slow sip of the piping hot savoury liquid inside before placing it back on the same spot. "Not bad. I obviously could make it a thousand times better, though."

"Yeah, I so want to kiss you right now," declared Todoroki very seriously, despite remaining as expressionless as always. For all his inherent denseness, he could already tell that their next few home-cooked meals would be made in competition with what they were eating right now - in other words, Bakugou was going to up his culinary game to win the one-sided cooking match. How could Todoroki not be so happy that he could smooch the air out of Bakugou's lungs right this very moment?

“Pfft! What’s with that?” Bakugou snorted dismissively, even though that smirk-turned-smile lingered on his face for a little while longer. He placed his elbow on the table so he could lean his head against his hand while he worked around his own food with his chopsticks. “I’m pretty sure we already hit that dumb kissing quota of yours for today. And yet you’re still begging for more?”

“To be fair, we never actually agreed on a number. So the quota can be as small or as big as I feel like on that day,” deadpanned Todoroki, perhaps being too honest and straightforward for his own good. There was no telling what Bakugou would do with that information. Or, actually, the most likely follow-up was that he would make Todoroki pick a number and then strictly enforce that quota from there onwards, no takebacks allowed.

“Oh yeah?” said Bakugou, right before… continuing to eat his food?

Huh? Isn’t this supposed to be the part where he demands an absurdly low number as our daily kissing quota, just to mess with me? Todoroki wondered in the back of his mind, his head slightly tilted as he observed Bakugou leisurely eating his delicious-looking lunch. The lack of any arguing or complaining was, honestly, astonishing. It was unknowingly leading Todoroki into thinking that… *He actually doesn’t mind at all kissing me at completely random moments, does he?*

The signs had been there all along. After all, Bakugou wasn’t one to do anything he didn’t want to do. Todoroki knew that. Bakugou himself also knew that. But neither of them had connected that one dot with everything else that had been unfolding as of late. Although there had been some complaints and hissy fits, there was an unusual absence of any violent outcomes aimed at Todoroki - save for that one time when Todoroki called Bakugou ‘easy’. Now he understood why.

Bakugou had been fully on board with kissing Todoroki right from the

start. In fact, he came to expect the kissing at any and all moments, to the point he became suspicious whenever there was a lack of it for a long period of time.

"...?" With Todoroki suddenly getting up from his seat, Bakugou was forced to lift his gaze from his plates and look up at him with a subdued quizzical expression. Since his first thought had been that he needed to go to the toilet or something, he didn't pay all that much attention to him. But the way Todoroki made an immediate beeline towards him quickly activated some foreshadowing alarm bells in the recesses of his mind.

All Bakugou managed to utter before he was smothered with some looooooooooong kisses was a half-baked "No, wai-".

-.-

Meanwhile…

"....."

"Oh. Done with your surveillance for the time being?" asked Burnin when she saw Enji lowering the binoculars he had been actively using since the couple of the week got inside their restaurant of choice. They had picked a pretty discreet table towards the back of the restaurant, and it hadn't been easy at all to find a good spot outside that enabled them a somewhat okay visual of the two of them as they ate their lunch.

"....." Enji offered no proper response, only a sour facial expression as he turned towards the opposite direction where he had been previously looking.

“Ah, I know that look on your face,” said Burnin, a knowing smirk slowly turning the corner of her lips upwards. “I bet they’re kissing once again. They are, aren’t they? I know they are, those two shameless lovebirds~”

“They’re faking it! They are definitely faking it!” Enji angrily retorted, his sour demeanour turning into a full-blown scowl. “No one in their god-damned right mind would be this obnoxiously in-your-face about their relationship or marriage or whatever! They are obviously exaggerating all of this on purpose, unaware that doing this much makes them come across as fake and disingenuous!”

“Or maybe - and I’ll hold your hand for this one - they are simply happy they no longer need to hide their relationship and can be as openly lovey-dovey in public as they usually are while in private,” pointed out Burnin with a quick shrug of her shoulders. “Three years of keeping a romantic relationship a secret from nearly the whole world must be tiring as heck. So of course they’re going a bit wild with their public displays of affection, ahaha!”

“This is no laughing matter!” admonished Enji, not at all pleased by how easygoing his sidekick was being in relation to the so-called couple’s daring make-out bouts. “They literally just got rid of all of those journalists and paparazzi! At this rate, someone will see them, take some very inappropriate photos and then share them who knows where! They’ve had enough scandals to last them a lifetime this week alone! I say, NO MORE!!!”

“Relax. Dynamight is fully aware of that, and you don’t see him complaining about it, right?” said Burnin, waving her hand around to dismiss that ill-fated possibility. To help comfort her boss, she grabbed her phone and started going through the latest pro hero news, hoping to show him the big nothing about them that there was up until now. “They’ve been public figures long enough to know the ins and outs of how not to get compromising photos of them ta- Ah…”

"'Ah'? What do you mean, 'ah'!?" hissed Enji, already starting to panic at all the implications that could have caused that sudden halt halfway through Burnin's sentence. He had been precisely one second away from yanking her smartphone out of her hands and checking what was going on with his own two eyes when Burnin began speaking once again.

"Worry not, there are no compromising photos of our lovebirds anywhere in sight," reassured Burnin, her eyes still stuck to the screen of her smartphone as she clicked on a certain video-based news article. "It's just that I finally figured out why they went to that building before they started their date. And yup, I was wrong. Dynamight didn't go there to tear a new one on every single worker of that mass media company."

"What are you talking abou-" grumbled Enji, getting more and more ticked off by the lack of a concrete explanation. Sure, he was relieved that no compromising photos were being spread online (for the time being, at the very least), but he still wanted to know what the hell was going on. Enji got his answer when Burnin suddenly turned the screen his way, a video already playing. What he saw silenced him at first, but not for very long. "What the…!? Are they out of their minds!?"

"Man, Dynamight really is a genius mastermind~" Burnin praised the young pro hero with a singsong voice. "I would have never thought about weaponising an interview like this to force all other reporters, journalists and paparazzi to back off for good. It really is no wonder he is so sought after by pretty much everyone in our field! Your boy sure is lucky to have landed such a skilled spouse, huh? I don't think any of your bride candidates could have come up with a better plan either, ahahaha!"

Enji not only ground his teeth at Burnin's high-spirited commendation, but also throughout the entire, give or take, half-hour-long interview. Yet again, his 'opponents' had managed to score point after point in their defence, while he was left completely empty-handed…

Chapter 50

Chapter Notes

Hello, everyone! Mafy here!

I can barely believe "Backwards" is hitting its first big milestone, the 50th chapter. As usual, I didn't think it would get this big this fast when I started writing it, and yet here we are, 50 chapters in, and our idiot lovebirds haven't been married for even a full week XD They have a long way to go ahead of them, don't they?

I truly appreciate all the support and comments this fanfic has received so far. You guys are the absolute best ＜3
I will keep working hard for the sake of our TodoBaku Mondays, and look forward to bringing you 50 more chapters in the future!

“Bakugou.”

“.....”

“Bakugou,” sighed Todoroki, giving his calling one more attempt. But by the looks of it - especially the look on Bakugou’s cranky, frowning face - a certain someone was still very much sulking at Todoroki.

It had all started when they were still at the restaurant where they had their lunch.

“I was the one who picked this place. I should be the one covering the entire bill,” said Bakugou for what felt like the millionth time since the waitress had brought their bill after they were done eating.

“No, but I was the one who suggested we go on this date. Doesn’t dating etiquette say the one doing the invitation is the one who pays?” pointed out Todoroki, likewise insisting he be the one to pay for their

meal. “You didn’t complain when I paid for the aquarium tickets. Why are you being so stubborn about the restaurant bill?”

“This and that are two completely different scenarios,” scoffed Bakugou, his indignation clear in the tone of his voice. “*You* picked the aquarium and the movie. *I* picked the restaurant. Go right ahead and pay for those two, but *I* will pay for the restaurant!”

“We’re married, so does that even matter to begin with?” added Todoroki after a small sigh.

“In that case, just let me pay, damn it!” hissed Bakugou as he motioned his hand towards the printed receipt that summarised their lunch expenses and calculated the total with tax included. However, before he could get to that piece of paper, Todoroki slapped his hand on top of it, blocking Bakugou’s access to it. “Hey!”

“How about we take a small pause and cool off a bit before we decide who pays what?” suggested Todoroki, keeping his hand on top of the printed receipt until Bakugou grumbled a very begrudging acknowledgment. “I’m going to the toilet real quick, and then we can continue talking.”

Todoroki’s real objective was, obviously, not the toilet. On his way there, he approached one of the waitresses, and after letting her know he wanted to pay for their bill, she guided him to the cash register and Todoroki paid for their entire lunch with his card. Only then did he go to the toilet, so that his little trick would be believable right until it was revealed.

However, Todoroki hadn’t considered that Bakugou would probably try to pull the same trick on him while he was absent from the table. Hence, when he returned, he did so to a fuming mad ‘spouse’. To make it even worse, Todoroki opened his big mouth and added, “Well,

I got to it first, so let's just leave it at that."

Bakugou and his relentless competitiveness did not like that. At all. So he had been silently sulking at Todoroki ever since they left the restaurant and began their leisurely walk back to their car.

Hmm… Maybe I should have just let him pay this time. Or at the very least, split the bill with him, Todoroki thought to himself. He so wanted to continue holding hands with Bakugou as they walked back to their parking spot, but his 'husband' had his arms crossed over his chest as he stomped right next to him. Todoroki couldn't really tell if Bakugou was doing that on purpose or if it was a direct consequence of the earlier dispute, but it still meant he couldn't do that little thing he had come to enjoy so much.

Because of that, Todoroki was now left wondering whether letting Bakugou pay for their lunch would have been the right choice. He had done what he had thought to be the correct thing - he invited Bakugou on this fake date, so of course he should take the entire financial burden. They more or less made the same amount of money as pro heroes, which meant their personal finances had nothing to do with it. Todoroki had just followed the 'dating 101' script he was acquainted with.

However, by doing so, it seemed he had overlooked a very important detail: Bakugou simply wasn't your regular 'dating partner'. To begin with, he had no interest in dating or going out on dates. Going by that, maybe Bakugou also didn't care about proper dating etiquette and all the little rules that seemingly went into it. So, maybe in his mind, any decision or move that was made during a date that came from his own initiative was interpreted as something he needed to take full responsibility for and, hence, also pay for. Bakugou had even told him as such, but since Todoroki had been so stuck in his own interpretation of dating culture, he dismissed it as just Bakugou being unreasonably fussy.

“Bakugou,” called Todoroki one more time after a small sigh. It seemed he had to play the understanding, doting ‘husband’ for this sort of thing too whenever it came to his moody ‘spouse’. “Do you want to be the one paying for the movie?”

“……Where did that one come from, all of a sudden?” grumbled Bakugou with a healthy dose of skepticism. His gaze was but a thin slit as he suspiciously kept Todoroki under very close observation.

“I’ve been reflecting on what happened earlier, and decided to compromise a bit,” explained Todoroki, nodding his head once to show how resolute he was about compromising with Bakugou despite their mismatched beliefs. “Since there’s no way to redo the past, I figured we could make things equal by letting you pay for something I was supposed to.”

“……”

“I’m not plotting anything, don’t worry,” deadpanned Todoroki when he saw Bakugou’s red eyes tightening even further as he tried to figure out what the catch of all that was. “I’m just making things fair, like we agreed on.”

“…In that case, yeah, I’ll pay for it,” acknowledged Bakugou, even though he was still waiting for some sort of deceitful trick to unfold right afterwards. But since Todoroki simply nodded his head and said, “Okay,” it was sort of hard to remain with his guard sky high.

“Oh, speaking of which. What should we do about the movie?” asked Todoroki, eager to keep the conversation going now that he had managed to thaw Bakugou’s sulky silence. “Given our location, I’m pretty sure there should be a movie theatre somewhere close by. I think we should leave our car parked where it is, and go to the main streets on foot. Now that our interview has been released, we won’t

have to worry about journalists and reporters, just about the most stubborn and vengeful paparazzi."

"I haven't been keeping much attention on what is going around on social media, but I'm pretty sure our idiots would have been joking around about it in the group chat by now if we were trending once again," pointed out Bakugou, grabbing his phone so he could check the location of the closest movie theatre to them. "I mean, we probably *are* trending again, just not for this 'date'. I guess we've been doing a good job with our disguises and not gathering too much attention on us."

"Right," said Todoroki, his deadpan expression getting even more expressionless. They had actually been spotted at least one time, but by the looks of it, that young woman had kept her word and hadn't exposed their location. "Is that a good thing, though? If no one spots us and then raves about it online, this 'date' won't have that big of an impact on my father or on the villain cult members, right?"

"Oh yeah, that's true…" groaned Bakugou. He was liking the calmness of his surroundings so much that he forgot that very important detail. If they couldn't get some murmuring about their date going, then they would have wasted a whole day by making zero progress towards their ultimate goals. He really didn't like what he was going to do, but they literally had no other choice. "Damn it, this has got to go… And yours has got to go too."

"Oh." Todoroki simply watched as Bakugou removed his face mask and then did the same to his sunglasses. Now, both of their faces and overall appearance would be a whole lot more recognisable, which could very well be a very dangerous gamble. "Are you sure about this?"

"I hate it, yeah, but I hate the thought of wasting an entire day even more," grumbled Bakugou, his frowning features now fully visible to both Todoroki and the occasional passersby.

“Yeah, that sounds about right,” chuckled Todoroki, finding that answer so very much like Bakugou. On some very rare occasions, Bakugou would make the conscious decision to do something that he very much did not want to do, solely for the fact that it was the best way to accomplish his objectives. It seemed this was one of such occasions. With that being the case, Todoroki wanted to do his best, too, so that they got everything done before their fake date was over. One of the best ways to do so would be to continue what he had done so many times these last couple of days: hold Bakugou’s preferred hand as they walked outside. “Which way should we head towards?”

“That way,” indicated Bakugou while giving a small jerk with his chin to point at the street they needed to take to more easily get to the movie theatre.

“What kind of movies are being screened right now?” asked Todoroki next. He wasn’t a movie person, and his job had zero connection to the big screen world; hence, this was a topic that Todoroki literally knew nothing about, aside from the scant movies he had watched as a high schooler.

“The usual mix of genres,” said Bakugou with a dismissive shrug. Anticipating what Todoroki would say next, he added, “Don’t ask me if any of them is worth watching. I couldn’t care less about movies. What we want is the appearance of going on a legit date. Any movie will do.”

“In that case…” mumbled Todoroki, his last word dragging for a while as he thought about his pick of a movie. With Bakugou giving him carte blanche regarding their upcoming dating activity, there was a lot to choose from. However, one specific genre quickly came to mind, for several different reasons. “Let’s watch one of the romance movies. You were hoping to use that kind of media as inspiration for our fake relationship, right?”

“Ugh… You still remember that…?” groaned Bakugou, only not facepalming himself because both of his hands were currently busy with his smartphone and Todoroki’s hand.

“The way you exposed yourself completely unprompted was pretty memorable,” deadpanned Todoroki, inwardly chuckling as he remembered how Bakugou had outed himself the moment Todoroki had turned on his TV. His response got Bakugou groaning and cringing some more, which Todoroki found to be equal parts amusing and endearing.

“Fair warning, but the stupidity that is always found in that sort of movie has a 110% probability of putting me in a really bad mood,” grumbled Bakugou, the forewarned bad mood already rearing its ugly head, even though they hadn’t even set a foot inside the movie theatre. “Are you sure you still want to pick that?”

“It’ll be a big help for our mission, so yeah, I’ll take the risk,” acknowledged Todoroki with a small nod of his head. Bakugou giving him a warning like this one in advance was actually what made him dead set on picking that genre, whichever movies they had available. They’d be inside a movie theatre and talking was forbidden, which was already leaving him pretty curious about what would be Bakugou’s reaction during the scenes that annoyed him to no end. *Knowing Bakugou, I could see him rage-quitting the movie halfway through it. No, wait. Since he’s so stubborn, he might also power through it until the credits are over just to not be accused of losing against a romance movie… Yeah, we are definitely watching the most romantic movie they have available.*

With his mind made up and curiosity extremely piqued, Todoroki wanted to arrive at the movie theatre as soon as possible. That got him to fasten his walking pace a little bit, which didn’t go unnoticed by Bakugou.

“What are you getting all excited for?” snorted Bakugou, tugging

slightly at Todoroki's arm to force him to slow down a notch. "Don't tell me this is also your first time going to the cinema or something."

"No, I've gone a couple of times when we were in high school," said Todoroki, promptly cooling off his jets as he had indirectly been told to. "I've never gone with you, though."

"As if I'd waste my time with crap like that," dismissed Bakugou with a shrug of his shoulders. He had received about a thousand such invitations from Kirishima, Kaminari, and Sero, for the most part, but he had always turned them down, no matter how much they begged and pestered him for it. He couldn't exactly do that when the movie session was happening in the communal area of their dorm, but he had learned to use his sleeping schedule to escape that living hell pretty early on.

"Oh, does that mean you've never gone to the cinema?" asked Todoroki, quite surprised that there might actually exist something that he had more experience at than Bakugou. Unfortunately, that possibility was quickly demolished by the response he got.

"Huh? Of course I've gone to the cinema before," sighed Bakugou, shaking his head at how exactly Todoroki could have come to such a conclusion. "Unlike you, I wasn't a sheltered little brat. I had plenty of opportunities to go to the cinema before I started pouring all of my time into becoming a pro hero. So I've tried it out, it wasn't my thing, and I moved on with my life. If it weren't for this mission, I wouldn't even be checking where the closest one is."

"I see," acknowledged Todoroki, a bit disappointed but not entirely surprised. He had heard plenty of tales about Bakugou's childhood from Midoriya, so he had a vague idea of how busy but fulfilling it was. It had very much been the golden standard for an energetic little boy, which made it the total opposite of what Todoroki had experienced at the same age. "You definitely weren't watching romance movies, though."

“Hell no,” scoffed Bakugou, his tongue sticking out as he expressed his disgust through his face too.

“What kind of movies did you watch, then?” asked Todoroki, still chuckling a little bit at Bakugou’s overreaction.

“Who knows? It’s been so long that I no longer remember,” admitted Bakugou, once again cementing his uninterest in that sort of activity. “It probably was anime movies, or maybe some sort of action flick, or whatever. It’s not like kids have a lot to pick from due to the age restrictions.”

“I wouldn’t put it beneath you to sneak inside a different room after being told you couldn’t watch a certain movie because of your age,” deadpanned Todoroki, his accusation instantly making his ‘husband’ sputter into laughter.

“Yeah, that might have actually happened a couple of times,” admitted Bakugou, still recovering from that sudden laughing bout. Once he had somewhat recomposed himself, the smile he had on his lips changed into a more mischievous smirk as he turned his gaze solely to Todoroki. “Now that I’m a full-fledged adult, though, I no longer have to deal with any of those age restrictions. No matter what kind of movie it is.”

Just as Todoroki was beginning to open his mouth to ask if Bakugou was implying what he thought he was implying, or if his denseness was creating some sort of miscommunication, they were suddenly forced to yank their hands apart and take a couple of steps in opposite directions, all due to the flickering light they had caught from the corner of his eyes. Less than a second later, that flickering light became something more akin to a light beam, which crossed the entire street from one end to the other and far beyond. Its path was precisely on the spot where they had been before moving aside with their fast

reflexes.

Soon, that seemingly endless light beam expanded both upwards and downwards, creating what could only be described as a glowing, translucent wall that now also seemed to stretch towards the sky further than the human eye could see. The glow it possessed slowly started to dim until the wall's translucence turned into a solid white that blocked all visibility of the other side - which meant they had also become unable to see each other.

"'The heck…?" mumbled Bakugou to his own buttons, trying to figure out what exactly was going on. The answer to his question was delivered to him on a silver platter by the cacophony caused by a van speeding through the streets in a very unsafe manner. He could also hear some police sirens in the distance, but unlike the van, they seemed stuck further away. *Ah, they must have been the ones creating this wall stuff. They're using it to get away from the police. Which means they are either complete dumbasses who like to do evil stuff on the side or evil doers who are so bored with their regular lives that they turned into complete dumbasses.*

"Well, since it doesn't seem there's anyone else around, 'guess I gotta do it myself," sighed Bakugou, already setting down his belongings and smartphone on the floor by the shade of a tree.

In what seemed like the blink of an eye, Bakugou had flown from that spot of the sidewalk all the way to further down the road, hitting the upper side of the van with his feet. Thanks to the propulsion caused by his explosions, that kick alone got the van to steer off the road and (safely) crash against a nearby traffic light, rendering the vehicle immobile.

"Shit!" loudly cursed the driver, his sharp teeth grinding in frustration. He had no intention of giving up on his and his buddy's heist just yet, however. He looked to the side passenger and then back into the cargo area for the remaining two, and yelled, "Disperse like

we planned!!!”

All four passengers of the van exited the vehicle at the same time, rushing in different directions… which kind of didn’t go all that well in a street that was on the smaller size and with limited road access.

“Hah, you wish,” snorted Bakugou, at least slightly amused that his opponents weren’t simply quaking in their metaphorical boots. He gave himself some momentum by running the entire length of the van’s roof and jumped, quickly getting to his first target with some light explosions. He then proceeded to do exactly what he had done to the van and kicked the man on the back, throwing him down hard against the asphalt. “One down.”

Seeing what had just happened to one of his buddies, the driver cursed a few more times, mainly because he had sort of been forced to run in the same direction. It was more than obvious he was going to be the next one. But he wasn’t one to go down without a fight, no, sir. Instead of continuing to run, he came to a stop and faced the vacation-mode hero head-on - obviously, with the help of his Quirk.

“Come and get me if you can, asshole!” The man screamed, his whole body suddenly becoming covered in sharp, needle-like spikes. The way they shone against the sunlight seemed to indicate they were covered in some sort of liquid or substance.

“Oh, I will, don’t worry,” reassured Bakugou, a big, evil smirk on his lips. This day sure kept getting better and better. He could tell by their reaction to him that they did not belong to the villain cult that worshipped him. And that meant he had free rein to kick their asses into dust without needing to ask any questions first. Bakugou grabbed the man he had just arrested by the collar of his t-shirt and yanked him off the ground with one hand only. Bakugou then proceeded to rotate his body, tugging the scared man along, until he had the needed momentum to catapult the man towards the driver with a massive, but controlled, explosion.

“Argh!/Ugh!” groaned both the driver and the other man as their heads crashed against one another. They both crumpled to the ground, knocked out by the strong impact.

“And that makes two down,” snickered Bakugou, walking up to the passed-out duo so he could restrain both their arms and legs with their own clothes, always careful not to touch the unknown substance leaking out of the spikes. Once he was done with them, he immediately moved on to the remaining two, who were running in the opposite direction from these two.

Thanks to his Quirk, it was easy to bridge the wide gap between them, even though Bakugou had to go a bit slower since he didn’t have the support of his hero costume. The last two standing were a big, chubby man who was awkwardly running as fast as he could (which wasn’t particularly fast) and a woman who was pretty quick on her feet in comparison. Since the man was the one closest, Bakugou started with him.

“Eeek!” The man squeaked at the sight of Bakugou and his noisy explosions. By far, he was the only one who seemed not to be a good match for the villain lifestyle, as he looked absolutely scared for his life. That got him using his Quirk in a complete panic, not thinking too much about his surroundings or bystanders.

His body began glowing faintly until the light focused on a single point. From there, it suddenly expanded like a light beam - the same one that Bakugou had previously seen turning into that gigantic wall. This time, though, it had been activated in a very haphazard manner, making the beam cut through the façade of several residential and business buildings. Knowing what to expect of it, Bakugou promptly adjusted his trajectory to account for the incoming tall wall.

However, when the light beam started the expansion upwards and

downwards, which came together with its solidification, the ensuing wall destroyed the façade of every single building it had made contact with.

"Tsk, causing way more trouble than you're worth, are we?" Bakugou grumbled under his breath, the sound of screams and people running breaking free all over the street. He had yet again to adjust his game plan to account for all the debris and broken glass that was now falling towards him and the civilians in that damaged area. Luckily, his Quirk's destructive nature had long taught him the best way to deal with the debris it caused more often than not.

As he kept moving towards the man, Bakugou half spun his body so he'd be facing upwards and all of the falling debris right above him. He simultaneously created one large blast with his hand and detonated from a distance all the little droplets of his sweat that had been left behind as he zoomed through the air. That created a chain reaction of explosions that annihilated the falling debris and broken glass into a cloud of dust and small particles that wouldn't hurt anyone, for the most part.

"'Guess I'll have to deal with you real good, real fast…!" barked Bakugou, his smirk only growing wider as he came closer to the panicking man. He zoomed past him and instead grabbed onto a light post, which he used as a quick, easy way to turn back around. It also helped him to decelerate and make a safe landing on the ground. From there, he ran towards the man, the palms of his hands crackling with small explosions, if only for the fear factor.

"D-Don't come any closer…!!!" The man stammered, taking a couple of trembling steps back. His body once again started glowing in preparation for the next light beam shot, but Bakugou was faster. A single right hook to the face knocked the man out cold, his inert body falling backwards on the asphalt with a muffled thud.

One left, Bakugou told himself in the back of his mind, cracking his

knuckles after landing that one-shot punch. He turned around with the intention of 'hunting down' the woman next, but it seemed that was no longer necessary.

A wave of ice rushed towards the woman and engulfed the majority of her lower half, leaving her immobile but angrily screaming in the middle of the street.

"What took you so long?" asked Bakugou, leaning down to grab the passed-out man by the back of his clothes. He dragged him against the floor towards the location where the woman had been captured. As Bakugou did so, he was reunited with Todoroki, who was finally coming into view from an adjacent street. "Is this extended time off dulling your skills or something?"

"I couldn't go over the wall, it was too high," explained Todoroki, interpreting Bakugou's leisurely reaction to his return to mean that everybody involved in that heist had been captured already. "So I had to go the long way around it, which took some time."

"All I hear is lame excuse after lame excuse," scoffed Bakugou as he dumped the unconscious man against the ice formation. He motioned his hand to grab his phone, but then remembered he had left it somewhere else, together with the rest of his belongings. "You go ahead and contact the police. I'm gonna go get the other two chumps."

"Okay," said Todoroki with a small nod. He was going to ask if he needed help with that, but Bakugou was already on his merry way to do his thing. It looked like he needed to save the questions for a later time.

Todoroki began melting the block of ice caging the woman, as he didn't want to injure her with ice burns, while he got in contact with

the authorities. From what he was told after identifying himself as a pro hero, the police were mid-chase when they were blocked off by the Quirk of one of their targets. Since they weren't too far away, the police quickly got to where the extremely one-sided fight had occurred, accompanied by the pro hero who had been stationed at a nearby location.

"Oh! It really was you two!" exclaimed Kaminari, who turned out to be the pro hero who was around that area. "I'd been thinking, 'could it be?' when I was notified that two off-duty pro heroes had captured the villains I had been warned about, and it turns out I was right! 'Sorry these guys disrupted your 'honeymoon', wink-wink~"

"It's fine. We were just passing by on our way somewhere else," reassured Todoroki, missing completely the joking nature of Kaminari's apology. "Besides, stopping Bakugou from acting of his own accord would be more troublesome than just letting him run wild."

"Hear, hear," acknowledged Kaminari before he burst out laughing.

"I'm surprised you're the one currently in this area of the city, though," added Todoroki, his head slightly tilted as he wondered about this odd patrol arrangement. "You're not usually here, are you?"

"Oh, that's because I was called here to help deal with these guys," explained Kaminari while gesturing at the two evildoers currently being taken into a police car. "They weren't initially here, but in the town next door. Apparently, they stole some goods from a shipping company's warehouse, but failed to notice some of them were trackable. That's how the police chase got started. And, well, since they were being a tricky challenge because of that wall Quirk thing, they requested my presence around their perceived incoming route. If they were gonna escape, the police at least wanted me to completely wreck the stolen goods."

“Which were?” asked Todoroki, an eyebrow slightly perked from curiosity.

“Some seriously powerful computers,” said Kaminari with a small shrug. “You know, the kind used for research and so on. That’s why they were trackable. They were currently on their way somewhere else in the country. I have no clue how these guys got the intel needed to steal them, though. Well, not that figuring that out is part of our job description. I’ll let the pro detectives do the rest now that they have… Wait, where are the other two?”

“Right here.”

“Wah!!!” Shortly after hearing that extremely pissed-off voice, Kaminari was suddenly hit by something very heavy from behind. Yes, Bakugou had indeed just thrown one of the knocked-out men against him, making him topple down on the floor underneath the villain’s weight. Kaminari slowly pushed the dead weight away from his body and got back up with some additional bumps on his body. “H-Hello to you too, Kacchan…”

“Huh? You still dare to speak to me that casually?” Bakugou nearly growled, his crimson eyes blazing with anger. “Or do you just want to die that badly?”

“Gosh, we were just joking around. Like, you know, we do all the time in the group chat,” sighed Kaminari, not being one to test seriously-pissed-off-mode Bakugou - for the most part, that is. “Don’t take it the wrong way and relax, yeah? Oh, and next time you’re going to air hila- I mean, sudden interviews, give us a little warning first. I nearly busted my lungs from laughing so hard.”

“You guys seriously make me want to say, fuck this mission, I’m joining my worshippers,” grumbled Bakugou, as Kaminari’s unserious words reminded him of yet another reason why he was currently on his proverbial murder list. “But try again. Think long and hard with that pea-sized brain of yours as to why oh why I’m really in the mood to also throw this poisonous human porcupine at you.”

“Aha… Ahahaha… I have not the faintest idea why…” awkwardly laughed Kaminari, already in the process of backing away from Bakugou and the unconscious man covered in a very deadly-looking unknown substance at his feet. “Oh, I think that police officer is calling me! Gotta- Ack…!”

“Not so fast, Dunce Face,” interrupted Bakugou, grabbing him by the back of his hero suit’s collar and choking him slightly to stop him from running away with his tail tucked between his legs. His frown slowly changed into what could only be described as an extremely evil and sadistic smirk. “As the other counterpart, I need to make sure I show my gratitude for any wedding gifts offered to us. *Don’t I*?”

“Eeeek!
I’msorry,thatwasjustajoke,Iswear,itwasjustaharmlesslilprankthatmeantabsolu
squeaked Kaminari, the only thing stopping him from kneeling and prostrating himself at Bakugou’s feet being the current hold on his clothes. His body was literally shaking like leaves to the wind from the threatening vibe his good, old pal was exuding in copious amounts.

“You and your brainless, moronic, childish pranks end here, or I swear you’re gonna get a very painful, traumatic and bloody torture session the next chance I get!” hissed Bakugou, releasing Kaminari’s hero costume so he could turn around and face his fury head-on.

“Yes, yes! No more pranks! Promise!” Kaminari swore while fervently nodding his head.

“Hmph!” With that moody scoff, Bakugou turned around on his heels and started stomping towards the nearby police officers so he could provide them with his version of the events that had just unfolded during his time off.

“I probably just scraped off a couple of years from my lifespan with this one…” whimpered Kaminari, still scared shitless of Bakugou’s threats. Years of friendship with him had taught him that Bakugou always meant what he said whenever in this sort of bad mood… though that did little to nothing to stop Kaminari from teasing his friend into said bad mood. Once Bakugou was at a safe distance, he finally turned his attention back to his other former classmate.

“He found out all on his own,” deadpanned Todoroki, just in case Kaminari was wondering if he had told on him to his ‘husband’.

“Of course he did…” groaned Kaminari, his head slumping down out of resignation. This was the downside of having a super smart friend - the culprit of any pranks directed at him was always correctly identified and then immediately punished in equal proportion to the annoyance the prank had inflicted. Of course, Kaminari was also reckless and dumb enough to never learn from past mistakes, hence this was definitely not the last time he would see his life flashing before his eyes after a badly landed practical joke. “Welp, there’s no use crying over spilt milk, I guess. Feel free to drop by and return the ‘wedding gift’ whenever you feel like it. You still have a few more days off, right?”

“Ah… About that…” muttered Todoroki, not entirely sure how he was supposed to explain to Kaminari that the ‘wedding gift’ was no longer in a condition where it could be returned - in specific, an explanation that wouldn’t land him in hot water with his ‘husband’ again.

“What, did Bakugou explode with it or something?” snorted Kaminari, easily imagining his friend doing precisely that the moment his eyes spotted his prank gift.

“Yes. That,” Todoroki lied without a second thought, so very relieved that Kaminari had come up with a believable cover-up story all on his own. It meant he wasn’t going to be sent to the doghouse yet again for sharing more than he should.

“Aww man, what a waste,” sighed Kaminari, inwardly mourning the loss of the good stuff. He had even purchased the more expensive and high-quality products, to make his prank funnier but their destruction worse. “Oh, by the way. What are the two of you doing over here, to begin with? Is it some sort of investigation for your ‘mission’? Another hilarious public stunt, since you aren’t even trying to hide your identities?”

“Both, I guess?” said Todoroki, his head slightly tilted as he thought about Kaminari’s question. “We’re out on a date.”

“.....Come again?”

Chapter 51

“I’m done with my police statement, so let’s get going,” Bakugou reported back, finally returning from his lengthy conversation with some police officers and detectives.

“Okay,” readily acknowledged Todoroki, eager to return to their original dating schedule after this unforeseen intermission. Not that he really blamed Bakugou for it - under those circumstances, any respectable pro hero would put their time off on pause to deal with misbehaving villains in their surroundings. Plus, Todoroki was fully aware that the probability of trouble coming to find them was extremely high. They historically had that sort of track record, or maybe more specifically, bad luck. “We’ll see you around, then, Kaminari.”

“Y-Yeah… Keep up the good work,” said Kaminari, part of him still in disbelief at the explanation he had just received. He saw the two of them off while waving his hand, too focused on something else to even register the miffed glare Bakugou threw at him as they left. Just to play safe, Kaminari decided to pinch the back of his own hand. The pain he felt there - and the soreness in the area of his back that had taken that human cannonball - dispelled any possibility that he was currently dreaming or hallucinating. *Unofficial mission or not, just how the heck did Todoroki actually manage to convince Bakugou to willingly participate in a so-called fake date…? Man, maybe Bakugou really needs a long, peaceful vacation… The stress must be frying his brain or something… I know he can’t be* that *desperate to arrest all of his crazy worshippers, so temporary insanity due to prolonged stress can be the only explanation to… well, whatever this is.*

If that was the case, then there was only one thing that Kaminari could do. And that one thing was obviously to give them a hand here and there from the outside, even if just to offload a small percentage of the weight of this lengthy, multistage ‘mission’.

“Welp, time to tie up all the loose ends over here before I go back to my original work,” said Kaminari to his own buttons before he, too, went to reunite with the police task force he had been partnering with to deal with the group of thieves. Due to all the commotion and destruction that their arrest had caused, more and more people were gathering around the cordoned-off area, including the habitual hoard of reporters and journalists. Seeing them there, Kaminari’s eyes nearly sparkled with enthusiasm when a certain idea popped into his mind. “Oh! I know something that will give those two a little helping hand~”

With that genius (or so Kaminari thought) idea happily jolting him into action, the pro hero nearly skipped as he changed course and approached the curious mass media crowd.

By doing so, Kaminari obviously cemented his future painful, traumatic, and bloody torture session, but that was a story for another day.

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“How did it go with the police and the detectives?” asked Todoroki once they had rearranged their previous walking route to account for all the people gathering around that area. The last thing they wanted was to get surrounded by a mob of fans and grateful civilians, and get the final stage of their ‘date’ delayed even further.

“It went as usual,” scoffed Bakugou, wondering why Todoroki was even bothering to ask about something so mundane for someone with their job. “I told them how I kicked their asses in record time and was praised like a god for it. The end.”

“Still doing justice to your hero name, I see,” deadpanned Todoroki, the last person to be fazed by Bakugou’s arrogant (but very accurate)

boasting.

“Somebody has to,” said Bakugou with a quick shrug, like what he was saying was a given. “It’s not like I’ll get to the top by sitting still and waiting.”

“True,” acknowledged Todoroki, at the very least in agreement with that last assessment. “Anyway, were those four also a part of the villain group that worships you? Was this yet another of their attempts at getting your attention?”

“Unfortunately, nope. Just your run-of-the-mill idiot villains,” denied Bakugou, starting to get slightly disappointed about that particular detail now that the savoury action had died down. He could tell by the way Todoroki was silently staring at him that he didn’t fully believe him, which got him clicking his tongue in annoyance. “Their reaction to me was pretty darn telling, alright? They weren’t basically worshipping the ground I walk on like those lunatics usually do. Plus, if you’re paying attention, a single look at their eyes is all it takes for you to see the insanity festering inside their skulls. They’re like Izuku, only a thousand times worse and creepier.”

“Comparing them to Midoriya is a bit…” mumbled Todoroki, not entirely sure if using Bakugou’s childhood friend as a comparison for that sort of fanatical delusion was fair, or even deserved.

“Were you stalked by him when you were a brat? No? Then you have zero say on the matter,” Bakugou retorted, adding a peeved ‘hmph’ at the end. “But never mind the Shitty Nerd now! They definitely weren’t a part of that villain group. We were simply in the right place at the right time to catch them red-handed during their little stealing spree.”

“Some things truly never change, do they?” deadpanned Todoroki, alluding to a past incident where he and Bakugou had also caught a

few thieves while they were technically off the clock, similar to what had happened today. “It certainly brings back some memories.”

“Heh, I was a whole lot more original with my arresting methods today, compared to back then,” snorted Bakugou, knowing very well what his ‘husband’ was reminiscing about. “Plus, I clearly won this time. I took out not only the boss, but also the majority of them. You got one. It sucks to be so slow, doesn’t it? Maybe you could use some refresher lessons from Gang Orca, hehehe.”

“That, too, also brings back a lot of memories,” chuckled Todoroki. At first glance, it might have looked like he was now thinking back on those days of gruelling battle training as they attended supplementary classes as students to obtain their provisional hero licenses at long last. But instead, Todoroki was thinking about all the times Bakugou not-so-one-sidedly competed against him at completely random moments throughout that supplementary class period (mainly because Bakugou was still extremely pissed at him for how their fight during the sports festival had gone).

“You’re starting to sound like an old man thinking back on the good, old days,” snickered Bakugou, gleefully teasing him for his lack of originality with his phrasing sense. “Maybe instead of inheriting your father’s hero agency, you should also retire alongside him.”

“I can’t think of a worse way of ending my pro hero career,” deadpanned Todoroki, even though there was also a healthy dose of resentment and annoyance fueling his expressionless demeanour. That got Bakugou laughing all over again, which was the best way to end their friendly bickering, as far as Todoroki was concerned. It was only topped by how smoothly that enabled him to capture Bakugou’s hand all over again.

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Meanwhile…

“Man, these two must have been born under the same unlucky star or something, ‘cuz what’s up with their bad luck with villain encounters whenever they’re out and about?” marvelled Burnin, once again leaning her arms over the driving wheel as she kept the car parked down the street to continue following their two ‘targets’ without being spotted.

Because of that distance, they had also gotten stuck on the same side of the Quirk wall as Todoroki had been, but they could clearly hear how fast Bakugou was at getting into gear and cleaning up the whole place all on his own (which had pissed Enji a fair bit as, quote, “Shouto should be the one getting that arrest!”).

“How many times does this one make it? They’ve either gotten attacked or were coincidentally in the wrong place at the wrong time while together more times than I can count!” exclaimed Burnin, pretty amazed that the same two types of events kept happening whenever Shouto and Dynamight were in the same location. “It’s no wonder they’ve been keeping their dates locked up indoors. They’ve been doing it for the sake of the world. Thank you for your valiant sacrifice, you lovebirds! Enjoy your freedom!”

“No way! If this is how they are going to act while outside, then they should go back inside until they learn how to behave in public!” hissed Enji, a huge frown stuck on his scarred face ever since the villain incident. “Whether they are doing it on purpose to get on my nerves or to pretend they are this super lovey-dovey couple, they have proven themselves to be a huge liability to their own careers and reputation!”

“Translated into normal people without a paranoid mind speech, that means absolutely nothing,” sighed Burnin as she sat back straight and started the engine of the car, as the two lovebirds were getting too far away to observe from a distance. “No one freaks out or makes a fuss

whenever a pro hero couple goes out on a date, or they're spotted being all lovey-dovey, right? If anything, I think the overall public likes to see how normal pro heroes are deep down. It humanises them, ya know? Besides, this is the modern world we're living in, yeah? Everyone knows what a kiss is, ahahahaha!"

"Grrr… I'm saying all of this for their own sake…" grumbled Enji, even more annoyed that his sidekick was keeping her word and being 100% on the 'couple's' side.

"No, you're saying that because you're blinded by your own paranoia and wounded pride," pointed out Burnin with a shrug of her shoulders.

"Just drive already!" growled Enji, arms defensively and sulkingly crossed over his chest as he urged the sidekick to get going. She simply sighed a 'yes, yes,' and got the car back on the road.

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By using Bakugou's map-reading skills and an optimised route, not only did the fake couple arrive at the local movie theatre in a timely manner, but they also accomplished their goal of being more easily spotted by other people.

From the looks of it, their last-minute interview was doing wonders at keeping reporters and journalists far away from them, leaving them only open to being caught outside by your regular people. Compared to the 'professional stalkers', they kept their interactions with Bakugou and Todoroki to a much more tasteful degree. They were only stopped a handful of times throughout the half an hour or so that took them to arrive at their last destination. Photos were a different story, as both of them noticed a fair number of people getting their smartphones out the moment they spotted them, but well, that was pretty much a

recurrent event that they were already used to as popular pro heroes.

Social media is going to be buzzing with us today, too, concluded Bakugou, feeling a bit of a mixed feeling about that. He had done such a wonderful job throughout the past years to keep his private life far, far away from any public outlet, but that peaceful time period was now over and done with. *You'd think keeping a low profile while outside of your working hours would be seen as a good thing, but nah, all I got out of it was a fanatical group of delusional worshippers who think I'm a legit god… You just can never win with these fuckin' lunatics, can you…?*

His friends liked to joke about it a lot, but Bakugou was also aware that his overall vibe tended to attract the wrong sort of crowd. That was what made him decide to implement that strict 'my private life is none of anyone's business' plan that kept him completely off the radar the moment he clocked out. It's not like Bakugou could change his personality or the way he looked and came across to other people, so he figured that letting others think that his 'Great Explosion Murder God Dynamight' shtick was simply the image he wanted to give to others as a pro hero, while not being a full representation of who he was as a whole, would make him not as appealing to that wrong crowd, much like it had happened when he was a student.

Well, that whole plan seemed to have spectacularly blown up on his face, and here he was now.

Ugh, I so do not want to do this… But if it might make those lunatics easier to find and arrest, I have no choice but to do it… Bakugou groaned in the back of his mind, inwardly cringing just at the sight of the movie posters for the current romance movies out on the big screen. There was already a bit of a line to buy the tickets, which made that whole torture ritual and the annoyance that came with it all the more unbearable for him. By the time it was his and Todoroki's turn, he was ready to punch someone in the face if they looked at him the wrong way.

“Two tickets for the most romantic, lovey-dovey romance movie you currently have,” said Todoroki before Bakugou even had a chance to open his mouth.

I’m gonna kill him, I’m so gonna kill him, no one stop me ‘cuz I HAVE TO KILL HIM, Bakugou hissed to himself, fortunately managing to contain his begrudging chanting as just thoughts, while outwardly only stepping on Todoroki’s foot as hard as he could. The lack of reaction coming from his ‘husband’ told Bakugou everything he needed to know - Todoroki was 100% aware of what he was doing.

“Um… Excuse me, but… A-Are you sure about that…?” asked the young staff member with a certain hesitation as he glanced back and forth between the two men, one of whom looked royally pissed right now.

“Yes. We’re sure,” acknowledged Todoroki, once again speaking before Bakugou could… albeit this time he was forced to actually give a small jab on the side of his ‘husband’s’ torso to keep him quiet and under control. That earned him a vicious glare after the pained yelp.

“O-Okay. That will be…” said the young staff member, reluctantly doing as requested and getting two tickets for the seats Todoroki had pointed at for a pretty popular romance movie currently being screened. His soul nearly left his body when he said the total, and the person who ended up opening his wallet was the one who looked ready to murder someone right there, right then. Somehow, maybe thanks to all of his prayers, no one ended up being slaughtered in broad daylight…

“You are so gonna pay for this once we’re back home…” grumbled Bakugou under his breath to not bring even more attention to the two of them. Plenty of people recognised them, and many more were absolutely gobsmacked when they saw the two of them walking into the movie theatre that was currently featuring a movie that definitely did not match their overall image…

“So long as I still get to eat your home-cooked dinner, I won’t complain,” deadpanned Todoroki, fully aware the best move would have been to either apologise or just stay quiet. But he simply couldn’t help himself. There was just something so very appealing about teasing Bakugou in this type of harmless way. Todoroki knew he would later face Bakugou’s wrath full-on, but with their track record so far, that seemed like a small price to pay if he got to see his ‘husband’ sulking and grumbling at him. And that was exactly what Todoroki had gotten so far.

“Now you’ve said it… I’m so gonna get all of my spices out and cook something hotter than a freakin’ volcano for dinner…” grumbled Bakugou, his face scrunched up in a frown with a pouty undertone as he stomped towards and then dropped himself on his selected seat. “Get ready for the colour red to give you flashbacks about this day for the rest of your life…”

“There’s no need for that,” chuckled Todoroki, sitting down next to Bakugou just in time for the lights of the movie theatre to dim just a small fraction and for the customary ads to begin before they dived right into the actual movie. It seemed they had gotten there just in time, much like they had agreed on beforehand. Since the volume of the ads was quite loud, Todoroki had to lean closer to Bakugou and whisper right next to his ear for his voice to be heard. “Even without any culinary trauma, I will never forget this day. Mission or not, it is still my first date.”

“Ngh…” The softness of those words tickled at Bakugou’s ear in more ways than he could describe, which he tried to push away by covering it with his hand. Since that didn’t fully make up for all of it, he then turned that hand towards Todoroki’s face and physically pushed him away for good (or at least, as far away as he could with them sitting next to each other). Bakugou turned his pouty frown at Todoroki and hissed in a small voice. “No talking in here!”

As the rules-abiding man that he was, that stern warning got Todoroki

to sit up straight and face the big screen, even though all it was still showing was ad after movie trailer after ad. Seeing that, Bakugou also begrudgingly returned his attention to the screen while making himself as comfortable as possible in what would be over an hour of absolute brain-rotting torture.

Before they arrived, they had talked about whether they'd be eating and drinking anything while watching the movie or not, but since they had literally just eaten lunch, they both agreed on just watching the movie as is. In a way, Bakugou was thankful for that. With how annoyed he was about to get, it would be safer for everyone there if he didn't have any projectiles around him. He could force himself to stay silent throughout the entire length of the movie, but his body did tend to act before he could think about what he would do in reaction to the source of any sort of displeasure and irritation. His former classmates had found out the hard way how fast and precise his fists hit when Bakugou was rubbed the wrong way; he wasn't about to be arrested for being a public nuisance who was throwing food around because of a dumb movie.

So Bakugou metaphorically buckled down and began forcing himself to disengage his brain from all that noise and the images flashing on the big screen in front of them. He couldn't care less about all the other movies that would be released in the near future; he didn't even care about the one they were about to watch. He was going to focus on selecting the scenes that could be helpful for their mission and ignore everything else, to save himself from getting rage-baited by a stupid romance flick.

Or at the very least, that was his initial plan.

Bakugou had been having such a busy, eventful day that he had completely forgotten about a tiny little detail - he hadn't slept a wink the previous night. Now, with him sitting at a fairly comfortable chair in an increasingly darker room that had the temperature set as not too cold but also not too hot…

Yeah, Bakugou was out cold ten minutes after the movie started.

Even though movie theatres had the volume set fairly high, when Bakugou was out cold, he was out cold. He had nothing to worry about at a place like that. And even if something indeed happened, Todoroki was literally right next to him. There was simply no reason for him not to go into deep sleep mode and enjoy a little nap after saving the day for the millionth time.

At first, Todoroki remained completely unaware that Bakugou had fallen asleep. He was focused on the movie, even if it wasn't something he had all that much interest in aside from the utility it might have for their 'mission'.

But at some point, the sitting position in which Bakugou had settled himself stopped being as comfortable. As the messy sleeper that he was, of course he began moving around until he found the perfect position. That position just so happened to be leaning the side of his head on Todoroki's shoulder.

With Bakugou being the way he was, Todoroki was caught off guard by the soft landing of his head on his shoulder. As far as he was aware, there was no reason for the sudden physical contact. Worried that he might have missed something that Bakugou had noticed, Todoroki was about to ask him if there was any problem when he noticed the unusually serene demeanour on his 'husband's' face and the spaced rising and falling of his chest.

Impressive. I had no idea it was possible to fall asleep in such a noisy place, deadpanned Todoroki. No amount of studying or working as a pro hero could have prepared him to face such a peculiar situation. But then he remembered. Hadn't he seen something similar to this happen time and time again?

On the rare occasions where Kirishima, Kaminari and Sero had managed to convince Bakugou into participating in their dorm's movie nights, as soon as they reached a specific hour of the night, Bakugou would promptly start to nod off, no matter how noisy their former classmates were being with their movie-watching antics. The difference was that Bakugou would eventually get to a point where he silently got up all on his own and wobbled upstairs to his bedroom - something he couldn't exactly do right now.

Still, isn't it way too early for him to fall asleep? Todoroki wondered to himself, carefully tilting his head so he wouldn't accidentally hit Bakugou with it and wake him up. The arrests he performed earlier and all the walking they had been doing also didn't justify tiredness to the point of making an adult fall asleep in the middle of a movie theatre.

By the peaceful expression on his face, Todoroki could sort of tell that Bakugou was perfectly fine. He had simply fallen asleep. While watching a romance movie. At a movie theatre.

This is possibly the cutest way of rage-quitting a movie ever, chuckled Todoroki in the back of his mind, having had to cover his own mouth with the back of his hand so he wouldn't accidentally do it outwardly and wake up his sleeping 'husband'. He had just gotten the answer to his earlier question of what would be Bakugou's reaction to super romantic, lovey-dovey romance movies, and it was one he totally had not seen coming. *Now I really want to know when exactly he fell asleep. It's such a pity I only noticed it now. Maybe I should try to get him to do some more 'research' at home with me to see how long it truly takes him to fall asleep while watching romantic stuff on TV.*

Jokes aside, that actually sounded like a really great way for both of them to wind down after a busy day at work. Todoroki wasn't one to watch TV aside from the news and some occasional programs that would be of interest to someone in the pro hero trade. But he wholeheartedly would not say no to sitting down on the sofa after dinner together with Bakugou, just waiting to see how long it would take him to fall asleep while watching a myriad of different shows. If

Bakugou ended up using his shoulder as a pillow while at it, even better.

I didn't know the prospect of living together with someone could be this much fun, marvelled Todoroki to his own buttons. It certainly hadn't been like this when he was living in the dorm. And don't even get him started on what it had been like to live at his family's estate. This was an entirely different experience, in an 'uncharted territory' kind of way. *Is this what Mitsuki-san meant when she said that living together as a married person is completely different from living with other people in a dorm? But… I can't really think of anything that is worrying or complicated about me living with Bakugou in this sort of setting, though? In fact, it's so fun, cosy and peaceful that I…*

"...don't want it to end…" softly muttered Todoroki, carefully scooching closer to Bakugou while softly dropping his shoulders. Given their similar heights, that small adjustment should have made his shoulder even more comfortable for Bakugou to sleep on. And, as expected, it did. Soon after, Bakugou himself was snuggling up even more against Todoroki while mumbling something inaudible in his sleep.

Todoroki chuckled a little bit at Bakugou's sleeping actions and mannerisms, and then returned his gaze back to the big screen.

Since his 'husband' was fast asleep, it would be up to Todoroki to do all the 'research' on this movie and then report his findings back to him - perhaps through words, perhaps through actions.

Chapter 52

Time really did fly by when someone was having fun, and this movie session was proving itself to be exactly that sort of experience for Todoroki. Not because the movie turned out to be a great hit, or because he was into this sort of leisure activity, but because of all the possibilities it ended up unlocking.

I see. So this is what the majority of people consider to be romantic, concluded Todoroki in the back of his mind, finally able to go more in depth with his thoughts now that the credits were rolling and signalling the end of the movie. If he were to give his own two cents on the overall movie, there was a whole lot he could criticise, from all the inconsistencies in the plot and absurd choices certain characters had made to the ambience it portrayed at key scenes. But in terms of what their main and secondary objectives were, this movie pick had been okay-ish. *I still don't understand some bits of it and their purpose, or why the people around us were reacting so much during some specific scenes, but I think I got the gist of it.*

To summarise what Todoroki had observed, it seemed women were particularly weak to prince-like personas. In a way, he already had an inkling of that, as quite a lot of his fans called him 'Prince Shouto' at times. But this movie had cemented his perception that women really liked a well-mannered, gallant, and kind man, like the main male lead found in that fictional story. The 'prince rescuing the princess whenever needed, while not making her come across as weak or incompetent' trope was also a crowd-pleaser.

In terms of the romancing itself, a mixture of an idealised version of the perfect gentleman and wild, fervent passion was displayed as the winning strategy to steal someone's heart. Building upon mundane acts, like offering a small gift just because or doing something for someone before being asked, was a recurrent theme throughout the movie, which didn't go unnoticed by Todoroki. In a sense, he did agree with it - pleasing someone and providing them with what they wanted or needed unprompted could make the giver as happy and satisfied as the receiver, as Todoroki himself had come to find out. Of

course, quite a lot of it was dependent on personality and the moment, so everything ultimately had to be decided on a case-by-case basis.

The movie was pretty educational, but I have a question… Wasn't this more about how to seduce and get together with a woman?, Todoroki remarked in the back of his mind, his head slightly tilted as he marvelled at that very important detail. For once, neither he nor Bakugou were a woman, so the overwhelming heteronormative nuance of the entire movie didn't apply much to them. Then, the movie only covered the entire romancing process, showing very little of what came after the main leads got together. With their mission being based on them being a newlywed couple who had been dating for several years already, there wasn't much to take away from it. *This movie taught me how to get a girlfriend, but didn't show me anything about how to be happily married to Bakugou. While good in practice, it has zero applicability to me and my life. What a bummer…*

Regardless of the outcome, there were still some things Todoroki could take away from the movie. It might not have been a good example for a married couple, but it did show a version of love and romance that could be universally used by just about anyone. It reinforced that all the hand-holding they had been doing while outside was a hallmark of public displays of affection, and that going out on multi-step dates was one of the best ways to look like a legit couple.

It wasn't much, but I'm eager to share all of my findings with Bakugou, Todoroki remarked to his own buttons as he glanced at the young man still peacefully snoozing away against his shoulder. Part of him expected Bakugou to wake up at some point during the movie, especially in the louder scenes, but nope, he stayed asleep right until the end.

Now that the movie was over and the movie theatre was once again brightly illuminated, the people around them started to get up, animatedly talking with their own dates or friends about what they had just watched. Slowly but steadily, their surroundings grew emptier until only a few people were still around, most of whom were

staff members beginning to clean that room.

Todoroki made no attempts to get up or even move. He wanted to let Bakugou sleep for as long as possible, as it was quite obvious that he needed it. He was even starting to wonder if sleepiness was what had gotten his 'husband' so cranky during certain times of their outing. This was Bakugou he was talking about here; anything was possible for the no. 1 gremlin-like tsundere.

But, of course, they eventually ran out of time. The staff members cleaning the movie theatre were visibly becoming increasingly more curious about the two of them, constantly glancing their way before whispering amongst themselves. With the lights back on, both Todoroki and Bakugou were very easily recognisable as the two pro heroes constantly on the news as of late.

It looks like we can't afford to stay here any longer, sighed Todoroki in the back of his mind, slightly disappointed that he had to put an end to this heartwarming moment he was sharing with his sleeping 'spouse'. He truly did not want to be the reason why Bakugou was woken up from his nap, but all other alternatives were probably a whole lot worse for everyone involved - especially for Todoroki, who would definitely get blamed for it in some sort of way, no matter what. Carefully, very softly, Todoroki tried to call his name with a tone that wouldn't startle anyone. "Bakugou…"

"Huh…?" Bakugou mumbled, his head instantly being lifted from Todoroki's shoulder. He looked a bit dazed for a handful of seconds, like his brain was still in the middle of booting up.

"Oh. That was easier than I thought it would be," commented Todoroki, his eyebrow arched in amazement. Seeing as Bakugou had not woken up no matter how loud the movie got, he thought it would take him a handful of attempts until he got his 'husband' to wake up. Instead, a single call of his name had been enough to do the deed. The more Todoroki learned about Bakugou's sleeping patterns and habits,

the weirder they seemed… Though that, in itself, was so cute that Todoroki had no idea what to do with himself.

“Huh?” repeated Bakugou a second time, so very confused about what the heck Todoroki was even going on about.

“The movie ended a while ago,” explained Todoroki when he saw Bakugou look at the empty big screen on the other end of the movie theatre and frown at it. “You were sleeping like a baby, so I don’t blame you for not having noticed that up until now.”

“Sleeping like a baby, my ass…” grumbled Bakugou, his frown gaining some sulking undertones due to Todoroki’s offensive and extremely demeaning remark. Still… *Damn it. No matter how boring that dumb movie might have been, I can’t believe I actually fell asleep in a place like this. I should have known better than to watch a movie while sleep-deprived…*

“You were. You even drooled all over my shoulder,” said Todoroki, pointing with his index finger at the wet stain on the shoulder area of his t-shirt.

“I did not!” hissed Bakugou right away, refusing to believe he had fallen that low. Sure, he didn’t even remember having fallen asleep, and he didn’t wake up once throughout the entirety of the movie, but that did not mean Todoroki could throw around baseless accusations that defaced his good name! “This crappy movie theatre must have a leak on the ceiling or-”

“You were saying?” deadpanned Todoroki as he cupped Bakugou’s face with his hand and used his thumb to wipe the corner of his lips and the remnants of the drool that supposedly did not exist. The way Bakugou’s face burst into a flaming blush was like an injection of pure cuteness straight into Todoroki’s bloodstream, the way it got his heart

pumping that much faster. He was about to succumb to his strong urge to kiss Bakugou when the moody gremlin suddenly turned his head and bit his thumb. He even growled a little bit while doing it. There was no pain in this world severe enough to make Todoroki unable to laugh at such an insanely adorable retaliation. “Pfft… Ahahahaha.”

“‘Want me tah bite yah even ha’der?” growled Bakugou, his ‘husband’s’ thumb still being chomped by his front teeth. He didn’t know about Todoroki, but he was fully aware that the human jaw was powerful enough to bite through very hard things - yes, including fingers. If Todoroki didn’t want to be rushed to the hospital with his severed thumb inside an ice bag, he would do well to stop laughing right this instant.

“No, I’d rather kiss you,” chuckled Todoroki, pulling his hand toward him and, with it, bringing Bakugou’s face closer. It was a bit tricky to get his thumb away from Bakugou’s teeth and clenched jaw, but well, where there’s a will, there’s a way. He really, really, *really* wanted to kiss him right now, and he would not let anything get in his way.

Maybe Bakugou was still feeling a bit groggy from his nap, or maybe he had finally given up on ruining Todoroki’s kissing attempts for good; Todoroki couldn’t really tell which it was. But this time around, it was extremely easy to capture his lips. They were so soft to the touch, and carried a sweetness that had gotten Todoroki hooked to them since the very first kiss they had shared. A small lick to them was all it took for Bakugou to slowly part them - a reaction that Todoroki shamelessly exploited to deepen their kiss even further. The sweetness became even more decadent, warming up his chest all the way to its core like a velvety cup of hot cocoa.

“Haa, haa…!” gasped Bakugou, the pleasantly air-conditioned air around him contrasting immensely with his pinkish cheekbones. His face soon creased into a pouty frown as he shook his head and freed himself from Todoroki’s tender hand once and for all. “You have less self-control than a freaking animal… This dumb movie better not have put even more dumb ideas in that dumb brain of yours…”

“I’ll tell you all about it, don’t worry,” chuckled Todoroki, unable to comment on the part about his ruined-for-life self-control. He had already learned his lesson about how senseless and outright dangerous it could be to try to warn Bakugou about how he’s partially to blame for his shameless displays of affection and lack of discretion. Todoroki might as well just keep doing what he enjoyed so much and deal with the consequences afterwards. Like, for example, inspecting his thumb, which now had a bite mark around it, for any actual damage. “Oh.”

“What now…?” grumbled Bakugou, his gaze tightening suspiciously at hearing that all-too-familiar interjection.

“Can we pass by somewhere else first before we go home?” requested Todoroki, suddenly getting up in a rush, knowing very well time was of the essence with this sudden idea. “I just remembered something we’ve been neglecting this whole time.”

“Huh?” That and a confused arched eyebrow was all Bakugou could muster before Todoroki grabbed his hand and started urging him to also get up from his seat.

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Meanwhile…

“Man, who would have thought this is how movie theatres work in modern times…” marvelled Burnin, too fascinated by all the digital machinery around her to be paying any attention to anything else. After all, it wasn’t every day she found herself backstage of a movie theatre, usually only accessible to staff members. But, much like in the aquarium, she and Enji managed to get inside by using the same ‘danger-free training exercise’ excuse and continued following their

‘targets’ from a very safe, practical distance.

“Stop playing around and focus, will you?” barked Enji, his brow twitching in annoyance at his sidekick’s flippant attitude towards their current mission. Because of the darkness of the movie theatre, he had been unable to see much of his son throughout the entire movie session. But now that it had ended and the lights were back on, he could finally resume his long-distance surveillance.

Only that it wasn’t all that easy to keep track of someone when all he could use was a very small window, only big enough for the movie to be screened on the opposite end of the very spacious room. All Enji could see were their heads and nothing more.

Given their current positions, Enji could only conclude they must have been secretly talking among themselves and colluding on their next moves against him, which got him on his guard. He patiently waited for their plotting to be over, but that must have been one heck of a plan, for the movie theatre was pretty much empty by the time they finally started to move and straighten their sitting positions.

Alright, what’s your next move then? Enji wondered in the back of his mind, his gaze nothing more than thin slits as he closely followed every single one of their movements. Were they getting ready for more daylight fake flirting in the middle of the street? Walking to their next location to continue this pretend date? Some other way to make complete fools of themselves in a very public way? Enji waited with bated breath, trying to come up with all possibilities so he wouldn’t get caught by surprise anymore.

However, none of that could have prepared him for what he was about to witness with his own two eyeballs. He was Shouto’s father and had known him his entire life. It could be said that, thanks to that, he had a pretty good read on his son, for the most part. Of course, he was aware that there were minute differences in how someone behaved depending on where they were or who they were

with. However, those minute differences were something small, incapable of radically changing someone's essence so long as they weren't faking it. And Shouto wasn't someone who could fake his personality or lie very convincingly to begin with.

That's why Enji could tell that the smile on his son's face was real. He could also tell it was an expression he had never seen him do. Yes, Enji had seen Shouto smile and laugh before, even with it being a rare occurrence due to his trademark expressionlessness. But not like this. Never like this.

No amount of colluding and genius ploys could turn such a clumsy man into a stellar actor. Which meant no lying, no faking, no pretending was happening right now. What Enji was seeing at this precise moment was the whole, bare-bones truth.

Shouto was genuinely happy about being with Bakugou like this.

"We're leaving, Burnin," said Enji as he turned around on his heels and started stomping towards the door.

"Aye, aye, Boss~ Where to this time?" acknowledged Burnin, briefly saluting Enji before she started following after him. "Are they moving to their next dating spot? I can't wait to find out what those two lovebirds have in store for all of us next~!"

"No, we're going back to the hero agency," corrected Enji, a quite serious demeanour on his face rather than the previous angry frown. "We're done following them for today."

"Whaaat? Why the sudden 180?" asked Burnin, extremely surprised by this abrupt change of plans. The way things had been going, she thought Enji would only end their surveillance mission once the

couple was safely back home, and even then, he would make them stay there for a couple of hours more to make sure they didn't leave their apartment a second time. "Oh, does this mean you are finally ready to acknowledge and accept their relationship?"

"No. I just need some extra time and planning for what's coming next," announced Enji, his stern voice coming across as extremely foreshadowing, even to his sidekick.

"Ugh, bottomless stubbornness should be illegal for real…" groaned Burnin while rolling her eyes at her boss's inability to give up once he had made up his mind. "Just let them enjoy their honeymoon in peace and quiet already. They aren't hurting anyone, not even themselves, by being all lovey-dovey in public. And they have proven themselves more than capable of doing their job as pro heroes while being in a relationship. Just because Dynamight wasn't in your 'ideal bride' catalogue doesn't mean he isn't the perfect partner for Shouto, you know?"

"Heh, I don't know about that," snorted Enji, his lips slowly curling into a calculating smirk. "No matter how hard they try, their little plan won't deceive me. It was dumb of them to think they even had a chance of succeeding. I'll give them some credit for trying so hard, but the outcome will still be an undisputable victory for me. No matter how Shouto feels about it, I will have him married to someone worthy of such an important role. Anything less than perfection won't do."

"…I'm not trying to be mean or anything, but keep going like this and Shouto will cut you off from his life," warned Burnin after letting out a small sigh, her chipper demeanour turning a whole lot more serious than it had been the entire day. "You already lost a son, and another isn't on speaking terms with you, for the most part. Please don't damage your own family any more than it already is, and all because of outdated family traditions that no one except you wants to follow…"

“I’m fully aware of that. I don’t need any reminders,” said Enji, turning his face away from his sidekick’s judging gaze. While he appreciated the sentiment, that wasn’t the kind of thing he wanted to hear at the moment. Enji knew very well the possible repercussions for his pigheaded decision to follow through with ‘outdated’ family traditions. He, however, was willing to take the risk - and that was for one reason only.

Enji had long placed himself in a position that made him the bad guy in other people’s stories, even as a famous pro hero. At this point in his life, he did not mind carrying on with such a role, so long as those he loved had the happy ending they wished for.

Chapter 53

“I think I saw one around here…” mumbled Todoroki, more to his own buttons than to his still clueless ‘spouse’. They were back on the same street where they had previously caught the group of wannabe thieves, which was now a whole lot calmer without all of those police cars and curious onlookers. Some areas were still cordoned off due to the damage to the buildings, but the repairs were already underway. Because of that and having paid little attention to their surroundings earlier, it took Todoroki a while to locate the store in question. “Oh, there it is. I had the feeling we had passed by one on our way to the movie theatre, and it seems I was right.”

“Wait, *this* is where you want to go next?” asked Bakugou once he managed to close his wide-open mouth. He was already expecting weirdness to come his way, seeing as this was Todoroki he was dealing with here, but such an establishment wasn’t necessarily what he had been counting on. “You’re the last person I imagined wanting to go to jewelry stores on a day off…”

“Usually, yeah, I wouldn’t want to visit this sort of store,” acknowledged Todoroki, holding Bakugou’s hand a bit more tightly just in case he was getting ready to beat a hasty retreat. “But I think it’s about time we buy them, right? We’ve been married for a few days now, and with the amount of photos everybody has been taking of us, people might start suspecting something is missing.”

“Why even bother? That’d be a total waste of money…” groaned Bakugou, quickly getting the gist of what Todoroki was talking about without the words ‘wedding rings’ having to be mentioned even once. “Besides, it’s not like we can wear or carry them with us. Not with our Quirks. They’d melt or break in record time, and I’m not about to add jewelry to my weekly shopping list.”

“They might have something we can wear. We won’t know until we ask,” insisted Todoroki, pulling at Bakugou’s hand to drag him inside

the jewelry store too. He was fully aware of the hardships they'd face in finding something compatible not only with their Quirks but also with their lifestyle as pro heroes. However, he wasn't going to give up on buying a pair of wedding rings until an expert told him that such a product did not currently exist.

"Stubbornness truly runs in the family with you guys, doesn't it…?" grumbled Bakugou under his breath as he was swiftly brought inside the small store. Due to the location and the time of day, the store was pretty much empty, with just one older lady currently browsing through the glass displays by one of the walls. Bakugou was more than okay with that, as he didn't want more sets of photos of him doing ridiculous stuff plaguing his social media and news feed, all for the sake of this unofficial mission.

"Hm… I'd say something simple would be the best for us, but…" said Todoroki, ignoring completely his 'husband's' annoyed grumblings and the pouty frown on his face. He wasn't an expert in jewelry or metals, but he had a certain notion of what the melting points of the more famous ones were.

It would be easy to find rings made of a material that could withstand the highest temperatures of his flames, like gold, platinum and even tungsten. The problem was the rapid cooling of said metals and the strain of constantly switching between two very extreme temperatures. Some alloys got stronger by rapidly cooling them, while others got brittle and deformed. Safety also needed to be taken into consideration, as very hot and very cold metal could cause severe burns, through both direct and indirect contact with human skin.

Then, of course, Bakugou's Quirk brought about an entirely new set of issues. Extreme temperatures weren't as much of a problem in his case, but constant explosions definitely caused a type of wear and tear that had never been tested in the jewelry trade. There was simply no telling what kind of damage the ring would sustain or how the material would react to it over a prolonged period.

“Like I keep telling you, this is a waste of time and money,” sighed Bakugou, rolling his eyes at the intense stare his ‘husband’ was throwing at the ring section of one of the display cases. “Most pro heroes don’t wear jewelry for a reason, yeah? Your father doesn’t wear a wedding ring either, as far as I’m aware.”

“That’s all the more reason for us to get them,” declared Todoroki, now twice as determined to find himself and Bakugou the perfect wedding rings. Seeing as even his father didn’t wear one, both during and outside his work hours, strutting about the hero agency with one on his ring finger seemed like a wonderful way to stick it to him. And for that, mindlessly browsing the display cases simply wasn’t cutting it. Todoroki walked straight to the store attendant with a grumbling Bakugou in hand. “Excuse me, we’re looking for wedding rings.”

“Oh. Certainly,” said the older man after blinking a couple of times at the unexpected customers that had just waltzed into his store. “What sort of rings are you looking for?”

“I don’t know,” admitted Todoroki, cutting right to the chase with the biggest roadblock he had ahead of him. “We’re pro heroes and our Quirks aren’t very jewelry-friendly. I’m pretty sure regular rings would either melt or break in a matter of days.”

“Hmm… Indeed, rings might not be a good match for you,” remarked the older man, knowing what he knew about these two famous pro heroes. “My best suggestion would be to simply avoid wearing them during your work hours, or remove them whenever you are using your Quirks.”

“I’d prefer it if we could keep them on at all times, though…” insisted Todoroki, even his expressionless face unable to contain how heartbroken that advice had gotten him.

“That is a bit of a challenge, given your circumstances,” said the older man, also sad to have to be the bearer of bad news. “While the raw material itself can be made to be durable, jewelry is simply not created with that intention in mind. It is oftentimes too fragile, even. I’m afraid you will be hard-pressed to find wedding rings that meet your needs, both here at my store and at other ones.”

“Told you so…” mumbled Bakugou after having heard exactly what he had already told Todoroki earlier.

“Oh…” Todoroki’s shoulders dropped despondently instantly. His dream of wearing matching wedding rings with Bakugou and rubbing them all over his father’s face had gone down the drain not even an hour after it had been born…

“However, if you do not mind having a still experimental product as your wedding rings, I do have something that might be of interest to the two of you,” announced the older man soon after, which promptly restored the expectant glint in Todoroki’s heterochromatic eyes. “Please excuse me for just a moment.”

“…?” Todoroki and Bakugou exchanged a puzzled look with one another as the older man turned around and went inside the staff-only area accessible from behind the counter where he had been sitting.

“This here is my grandson, who is currently mentoring under me to, hopefully, one day inherit my store once I retire,” explained the older man once he returned to the counter, this time accompanied by a much younger man with a striking resemblance to him. They were very obviously related to one another, as the older man had most kindly pointed out. “My grandson has only been studying to become a jeweller for a year, so he’s still quite wet behind the ears, but I can assure you he has what it takes to one day make a name for himself.”

“Okay…?” acknowledged Todoroki with a very uncertain tone, not entirely sure where exactly the store owner was trying to get at with this whole conversation.

“Oh, excuse me. This isn’t the time to be bragging about my grandson, ohoho,” laughed the older man once he noticed the increasingly more confused demeanour in his customers’ faces. “As a jeweller-in-training, he was fortunately gifted with a quite unusual, but very fitting Quirk. Are you familiar with the concept of indestructible objects?”

“Like, the ones in video games?” asked Bakugou, his eyebrow getting even more arched at that seemingly random question. He wasn’t much of a gamer, but as a former child with an actual childhood, he was familiar with the term. Todoroki, on the other hand, had no clue what they were talking about.

“Yes, yes. My grandson’s Quirk allows him to create something similar to it, so long as it is something he can fit in the palm of his hand,” explained the older man as he urged his grandson to put down the tray he had brought from the backroom on the counter. On it laid several trinkets and accessories, all of them small in size. The older man grabbed what looked like a glass rose bud and brought it to Todoroki. “If you wouldn’t mind, could you please try to melt this glass rose with your Quirk?”

“Sure.” Todoroki accepted that request without thinking twice, mainly because he was so very curious about this atypical jewelry store activity. While holding the small rose bud with his left hand, he created a small burst of strong flames. But nothing much happened to the intricate trinket. The glass neither heated up nor melted despite the surrounding fire. “Oh.”

“As you can see, the objects created by my grandson’s Quirk are, in layman's terms, indestructible objects. Or, at the very least, something similar to it,” proceeded the older man now that he had provided his customers with a little demonstration. “Unfortunately, it is possible to

destroy my grandson's creations, but only under very specific conditions, as far as we're aware. The first condition is that my grandson wants them destroyed. As their creator, he can revoke their status as indestructible objects whenever he so wishes. The second condition is if the origin of the material wishes for it to be destroyed. Of course, this is still an experimental production method that hasn't been approved for sale yet, so there might be other conditions we are still not aware of."

"Wait, hold on. What do you even mean, if the origin of the material wishes for it to be destroyed?" asked Bakugou, wanting to backtrack and seek some clarification due to the extremely confusing wording used for the second condition.

"I can only use organic matter as the raw material…" explained the grandson, his hand timidly raised in the air. "The glass rose was created using an actual rose. And I've made that dog-shaped pendant using some fur from my pet dog… I've never sold any product created with my Quirk, but friends and family have requested that I make some accessories using their hair locks, to make the final product more personal and meaningful. In those cases, the origin of the material, or in other words, the person from whom it originally came, can override the indestructible object status and destroy it…"

"Oh. We'll take that, then," said Todoroki right away, almost as if those words had broken free from his vocal cords by their own initiative. Luckily, both his brain and heart also held the same opinion on the matter, so his impulsive response turned out to be a-okay in his book.

"Hey!" Bakugou, on the other hand, wasn't as quick at making up his mind, especially when related to such an odd item that wasn't even a proper product for sale yet. Who knew if there wasn't some sort of nefarious effect secretly cast into it, or if it wouldn't fall within the classification of 'illegal item' as far as the HPS Commission was concerned…

“But don’t they sound like something perfect for us?” pointed out Todoroki, already deploying his expressionless puppy-dog eyes while looking at Bakugou. “If we use the ring created from the other’s ‘raw material’, our Quirks wouldn’t be able to damage them, even if we keep them on while we’re at work. Plus, knowing my father, he’s gonna be pissed about us wearing something like this as our wedding rings. But no matter how many times he tries, he won’t be able to destroy them. I see that as a win-win for everyone involved. Save for him, obviously.”

“Grrr…” While he still wasn’t entirely sold on the idea, Bakugou had to admit those were very convincing arguments. He, too, had the feeling that his ‘father-in-law’ wasn’t going to be all that happy about the rings and would try to melt them as soon as they were off their fingers. But with them not having to take them off for any reason, not even while at work, Endeavor simply wouldn’t have any opportunities to try to get rid of them, let alone find out they were ‘indestructible items’ to begin with - so long as Todoroki didn’t open his big mouth about it, of course.

“How much would two wedding rings of that kind be?” asked Todoroki, proceeding with his shopping plan now that he had obtained Bakugou’s begrudgingly silent consent.

“Oh, they wouldn’t cost you anything,” answered the older man, already grabbing his ring size measuring tools and a notebook and pen to get the planning started. He chuckled a little bit when he noticed his words had been met with an expressionless raised eyebrow and a very suspicious crimson glare. “I cannot in good conscience ask that a customer pay for an experimental product. It’s still being developed, which means it might not be at a stage where it can be sold to the general public without damaging the store’s or my grandson’s reputation. That’s why I don’t feel comfortable with adding a price tag to it just yet.”

“Yes, exactly…” added the grandson, albeit a bit more reluctantly than his mentor. “If possible, I’d also like to have the jewelry created by my Quirk tested in all sorts of environments, to better ascertain

what kind of customers and lifestyles they would be best suited for. Being worn every day by pro heroes like you is the best type of durability testing and quality control we could ask for…"

"If you end up finding the final product to be lacking or if you have any issues with the rings at a later date, feel free to come back to our store. We'll get the issues fixed or replace the product altogether with something more fitting," reassured the older man, smoothly including a few more benefits to their 'business exchange' to make it more enticing, as the experienced salesman that he was. "Also for free, of course."

"…That sounds way too good to be true," grumbled Bakugou, not relenting with his suspicious glare. "What's the catch, huh? Don't think you can buy my favour or anything along those lines with gifts and free services. No matter what others might say about me behind my back, I can't be bought or owned."

"Oh, no, no. That isn't our intention in the slightest," said the older man, shaking his head in denial of that (perhaps warranted) accusation. His grandson, likewise, turned ghastly pale, thinking they had just inadvertently gotten themselves in trouble with two highly ranked pro heroes. "We're fully aware that pro heroes are public servants and don't work for the betterment of anyone but the country as a whole. This isn't a bribe or an attempt at currying favour with both of you. Though I must admit… Without your intervention here today, I could have been out of a job right now or, worse yet, lost my grandson. So I can't deny that there is a bit of gratitude mixed into our offer that might make these free items and services akin to a gift brought forward by your earlier actions…"

"We were only doing our job, though. Kinda," pointed out Todoroki, not having expected to be so openly thanked for the earlier rescue and villain apprehension. While they were technically on vacation, they still had a duty to act in case of an emergency. Since there hadn't been any other pro heroes around at the time and the police officers chasing the thieves had been blocked somewhere else, it was up to Bakugou and him to step up to the plate and make sure no one got

hurt. However, the moment other pro heroes and the police arrived, they took a step back and let them deal with the rest of the case after providing them with their version of the events.

“Yes, but we are thankful for it, nevertheless,” chuckled the older man. He had been alive for a long, long time now and had learned plenty throughout those years. To see these two young men acting in accordance with their duties without seeking to gain anything else but what they rightfully deserved was a testament to how much the quality of pro heroes had improved as of late. “It would be an honour to have you two be the very first people to wear our new jewelry line on a trial basis.”

They exchanged another silent glance between themselves before Bakugou sighed and grumbled a moody “Fine, if you insist,” which got Todoroki chuckling as he provided the store owner and his grandson with a more definite ‘yes’.

With the entire fabrication happening through the power of a Quirk, the majority of the process was spent getting all the measurements and details about the design written down in a notebook, for the sake of safekeeping all the information about the final product in case there were any issues with it at a later date. Despite them being meant to symbolise their ‘marriage’, both Todoroki and Bakugou agreed about keeping the rings as simple as possible, as that would make them safer to wear while performing their work as pro heroes - while the rings themselves might be ‘indestructible objects’, their hero costumes and those around them were not, so they didn’t want to take any risks with elaborate designs or additional elements like gemstones.

Once the design was discussed, sketched on paper and approved by the ‘couple’, the creation of the indestructible object-like rings could be initiated.

“All you need is a bit of our hair, right?” asked Todoroki as he reached for the scissors that had been placed on top of the counter.

“Yes,” confirmed the grandson with a couple of nods of his head. “Since the design is so simple, I won’t need much of it either. A lock of hair big enough to circle your ring fingers, give or take, is more than enough.”

“Oka- Oh.” Todoroki was about to turn the scissors towards his own head to cut the required amount of hair when they were suddenly snatched away from his hand.

“Give that to me. If you do it, someone is gonna end up with a huge bald spot on their damned head,” grumbled Bakugou, his sixth sense telling him that leaving the hair cutting in his ‘husband’s’ hands would go down as nicely as giving a pair of scissors to a toddler. He wasn’t about to let a complete klutz who is unable to fully control his strength be the one in charge of such an important step. Bakugou cut the indicated length of his own hair with steady hands before repeating the same process with Todoroki, always careful with the area where he was chopping it from. Once he was done, he gave both locks of hair to the grandson. “Here ya go. Now, hurry it up.”

“Y-Yes, of course,” acknowledged the grandson, promptly putting his Quirk to good use after confirming that the ‘raw material’ was the correct amount and length for what it was intended for. With the design being so simple, the creation process was fairly straightforward and not all that time-consuming.

As he held the locks of hair in his closed hands, one lock in each, he could feel them changing into something more solid and with a completely different shape. When he opened his hands again, all that could be found on them were a pair of identical rings. The only difference between the two indestructible object-like wedding rings was their colours: one was golden, the other a light silver with thin streaks of red, just like the locks of hair that had originated them.

“What do you think…?” asked the grandson with a bit of hesitation, uncertain if his creation was up to the two pro heroes’ standards, even if they did look exactly as they had agreed on.

“Yeah, it’ll do,” said Bakugou with a dismissive shrug of his shoulders. He grabbed the silver ring and put it on his ring finger, wanting to check if it fit correctly or not. “The size is just fine, too.”

“Shouldn’t I be the one putting it on your finger?” pointed out Todoroki, his head slightly cocked to the left. In his mind, he had the impression that was how the ring exchange went, but then again, this wasn’t a wedding ceremony of any kind, so maybe it didn’t work like that…

“You think I need help putting a ring on?” grumbled Bakugou while throwing a moody stink eye at his ‘husband’. He was already annoyed at having to do all of this stuff for a measly accessory; adding to that could very well be the last mistake someone would make before they breathed their last. Obviously, Todoroki was completely oblivious to that, and it showed right away.

“No, but isn’t that the normal protocol for this kind of stuff?” noted Todoroki, choosing to do things by the book when unsure about the proper way of doing something. “You can also put my ring on my finger.”

“If you make me touch that, I’m gonna destroy it,” hissed Bakugou, his face all scrunched up with a frown, before he turned around on his heels and started stomping out of the jewelry store. Inwardly, he was fuming - albeit the core emotion behind that tempestuous mood was up for debate. *Why the hell does that half-assed dumbass always have to open his stupid mouth to spout all sorts of nonsense stuff? Who would want him to put a ring on their finger? Not me, that’s for sure! If he wants the normal wedding route, he can hurry it up with our mission, finish it, divorce me and get married to someone as brainless as him! ‘Cuz I ain’t doing it! Never! ABSOLUTELY NEVER!*

“Oh…” Todoroki could only watch as Bakugou stormed off during yet another of his hissy fits. While he knew this was just par for the course, typical gremlin Bakugou behaviour, he still couldn’t help but feel a tiny little bit disappointed at being told no in such an upfront way…

“One last piece of advice before you go your merry way,” chuckled the older man after witnessing the little bickering interaction. “Throughout the years, I’ve seen and talked with all sorts of couples. With someone like your spouse, I’d say you’d be more successful if other people aren’t present. You should try again when it’s just the two of you. If you do, I’m sure you’ll get to enjoy the intimate moment you were hoping for.”

“Oh. Okay. I will,” said Todoroki with a small nod of his head, even though he wasn’t entirely sure what exactly he was hoping for, to begin with. Something other than a rejection would be good, of course, but aside from that, Todoroki was having a hard time coming up with a proper set of expectations. Nevertheless, any piece of advice that might lead to a better relationship with Bakugou was highly appreciated. “Thank you.”

After exchanging some final pleasantries with both the older gentleman and his grandson, Todoroki too left the jewelry store, intending to find and go after Bakugou. With how little time had passed, he couldn’t have stormed off too far away. A quick turn to the street next door was all it took for Todoroki to find the man he was looking for.

“Ba-” Todoroki was going to call him and get his attention, but a single glance at the current look on his face immediately told him to pipe down and approach with caution. “Um… Is something wrong?”

“I’m gonna kill Kaminari. Like, kill *kill* him,” said Bakugou, his voice

calm but so very cold and menacing. The earlier sulky undertone of his frowning expression had completely faded, and pure, unadulterated anger was the only thing left behind. “I should have hit him with the poisonous human porcupine after all. That’s going to be a regret I will carry for the rest of my life, and the reason why he’ll be dead by the end of this week, that I promise you.”

“Oh,” gasped Todoroki when he took a peek at the screen of Bakugou’s smartphone. There, your regular news feed was open. The titles of every single news article currently being featured in it had their names followed by the words ‘out on a date’ and other similar remarks. Todoroki also quickly found the mention of Chargebolt in a few headlines, as a confirmation of the source used for the news articles.

Perhaps because the cat was out of the bag in such an open, official way, others stopped being as reticent about discussing that suspected possibility, especially online. The floodgates burst wide open, and from it came a never-ending supply of social media posts raving about having spotted the newlywed couple here and there, alongside all sorts of photos and small videos of them out in the wild and getting all flirty with one another.

Just like that, Todoroki and Bakugou conquered the no. 1 trending spot and broke the internet for the nth time that week.

Chapter 54

“Hmm~ Hmmm~” Satisfied with his one good deed of the day, Kaminari went about the rest of his shift as usual. With his emergency dispatch case completed, he could return to his usual assigned area, where he was currently doing his rounds outside with a big smile on his face. Kaminari was in such a great mood, actually, that he happily hummed a song while walking around the peaceful streets.

The sun was shining high and bright, the city was safe, he completed a last-minute mission without further issues, and he had even helped out his good, old buddy with his mission - how could Kaminari’s day get any better than this?

“Oh?” gasped Kaminari when he suddenly felt his smartphone vibrating from inside his hero costume’s pocket. He promptly grabbed it and checked who was trying to contact him. It turned out to be Kirishima, which Kaminari found to be a bit strange, seeing as his friend had literally told him a while ago he’d be a bit busier than usual for the rest of the week. Thinking something might have gone wrong with his mission, Kaminari immediately answered the phone call. “Kirishima~ Tell me things!”

“Dude, you need to change your name, get some plastic surgery to swap to an entirely different face, and move to the other side of the planet ASAP! Like, NOW!” yelped Kirishima right away in a mild panic, not even bothering to waste any time with the usual pleasantries.

“Wait, what? What’s wrong? What happened?” asked Kaminari, halting completely in the middle of the street. He wasn’t exactly expecting good news, but he also wasn’t counting on the bad news being about *him*!

“Why would you do this to yourself, Kaminari?” nearly sobbed

Kirishima, regretting so very much having been unable to keep a tight leash around his poor, poor friend's neck. *"You should know better than to babble like that to journalists and reporters! And to do it about something as dangerous as Bakugou's private life, even! Are you okay? Were you hit by a Quirk? Have you gone to the hospital already!?"*

"Wait, wait, wait! That's what this is all about?" noted Kaminari, already breathing out a huge sigh of relief. "Oh boy, you nearly gave me a heart attack here… I thought I had messed up big time with some sort of dangerous crime kingpin or something."

"You might as well have! We're talking about Bakugou here! He probably already has the perfect murder planned for you and is currently window shopping for your gravestone!" said Kirishima, absolutely gobsmacked that Kaminari was taking all of this so lightly. If he had been in his shoes, he'd be getting ready to partake in a very public humiliating apology, in hopes that it would quell some of his raging friend's anger. *"Why aren't you doing some damage control already!? He's still gonna torture you until you cry, but at least you'll live to see the next day!"*

"Nah, don't worry about it," reassured Kaminari with a relaxed, upbeat tone. "I didn't say anything that could put their mission at risk. Actually, I gave them a huge help with it. You see, earlier, when I bumped into them after they captured those villains whom the police and I were after, I talked with Todoroki for a bit. He said they were out on this 'date' to look like a legit couple and that they wanted to get people talking about it. But I had no clue about it, which pretty much meant they weren't being all that successful with that last part. So I decided to give them a little hand by 'accidentally' letting it slip that their date had been interrupted by that villain incident while I was talking with some reporters at the site. Now the whole world knows they were out on a 'date' when they saved the day, and their little mission for today has been completed, which also means that Bakugou can get some rest for the remainder of the day. Because holy shit, he desperately needs it. I still can't believe he agreed to go out on a fake date… The stress must be taking a toll on his mental health, the poor guy…"

“Ugh… Kaminari, you big dummy…” groaned Kirishima, now feeling twice as tired as he had already been. Due to the timeline of his current mission, he was currently taking the graveyard shift, meaning he had actually been sleeping throughout most of the latest developments and had just woken up to this big, sticky mess. Kirishima sighed as he said, *“Why don’t you go take a small peek at social media and go check how ‘unsuccessful’ they were being without your help with your own two eyes…?”*

“Hm? Alright,” said Kaminari, a bit confused as to why Kirishima was reacting so poorly to his brilliant contribution to their friends’ mission. With the call still ongoing, he opened his social media account and went to check the trending topics, as he knew that was the fastest way to find what he was looking for. And oh boy, did he find a whole lot more than he had bargained for. “What the…?”

During his break earlier in the day, Kaminari had followed his usual routine of checking social media and other news, both to update himself and to relax for a while. Back then, social media was pretty peaceful as a whole, without huge ripples shaking things up. The couple of the week was obviously still trending, as was to be expected, but he hadn’t seen their ‘date’ being talked about, which was what had led him to think their main task for the day wasn’t going all that well and that they could use some help to spread the word without it seeming too obvious.

Now, however, social media was in a total frenzy, and it was for one reason only. It seemed his earlier small interview with a couple of journalists had been the needed impetus to get more and more people talking about the so-called date. A never-ending supply of photos and short videos was now being shared online, and with it, everything that had happened so far throughout that date came to light.

In other words, all of the handholding, kissing attempts and the few successful kisses were being broadcast in 4K, much to the surprise of basically everyone who knew the ‘couple’ personally.

“Yeaaaaah, ‘what the…?’, indeed…” Kirishima sighed again, knowing full well what sort of shock his friend was going through right now. He had experienced the same whirlwind of emotions when he woke up and went to check the latest news in the pro hero world.

“Um… Are you sure these weren’t AI-generated or something…?” asked Kaminari just to play safe as he scrolled through an endless photo gallery of… whatever *this* was. “There’s no way these can be real…”

“Yeah, I thought so too at first, but nope, they are 100% real,” confirmed Kirishima, much to Kaminari’s stupefaction. The photos in question were so jaw-droppingly shocking that he had initially thought he had dreamt it all up. But after washing up his face with some cold water and checking his feed again, it dawned on Kirishima that he was definitely not dreaming or hallucinating.

“Seriously…?” mumbled Kaminari, still in the middle of processing all of that. He even had to force himself to tear his eyes away from the photos, close the social media app, and focus back on his phone call with Kirishima to be able to speak properly. “Um… Don’t take this the wrong way, but like… I know Bakugou is annoyingly good at everything he does, and he’s also petty enough to go through stupidly crazy lengths just to spite someone else, but… Doesn’t this kinda look……”

“Yeah… I getcha… I’m also kinda stumped about that…” sighed Kirishima, his relatability with Kaminari having increased exponentially thanks to their friends’ scandalous unofficial mission shenanigans. He remembered being told and reassured by both Bakugou and Todoroki that they had planned and agreed on being a bit more physically intimate with one another while out in public to sell their lie, but Kirishima also remembered perfectly that the key phrase behind such an agreement was ‘as a last resort’, not every five minutes. *“Like… Yeah, great for them, go get your kissing and PDA needs fulfilled if that’s what you want. But doing all of that for an unofficial mission is a bit… uhh… overkill?”*

“More like downright insane… Maybe we really should get Bakugou checked at the hospital?” suggested Kaminari, now ten times as worried about his friend’s well-being. “Todoroki, too, while we’re at it! Perhaps they have been affected by some sort of Quirk and haven’t noticed yet?”

“Err… Yeah, at this point, I’m pretty sure they haven’t noticed something *yet, but I don’t think it has anything to do with a Quirk… It’s kinda like, um, how should I put it…? Their brains haven’t caught up just yet?”* said Kirishima, trying his best to put his still confused thoughts on the matter into actual words. *“I don’t think we need to interfere with it, though. They’re adults. Let them sort out their things on their own. If they get too crazy about it, sure, maybe it’s time we step in. But for now, I say let them figure it out at their own pace.”*

“Whaaat? Are you sure? ‘Cuz there’s no way this is normal Bakugou or normal Todoroki behaviour,” Kaminari pointed out, an eyebrow slightly arched at Kirishima’s unusually lax reaction to their former classmates’ abnormally out-of-character conduct. “Like, our entire class has spent the past few years constantly joking about Todoroki’s inability to detect when someone is flirting with him. But now, out of the blue, he’s an expert at openly flirting with Bakugou. And don’t even get me started on Bakugou, the demonic overlord of rejecting anything that isn’t taking him straight to the no. 1 spot… There’s no way they are taking things this far because of a ‘mission’ they aren’t even getting paid for or receiving any recognition from! There has to be something more to it!”

“I think you just answered your own question there, ahaha…” awkwardly laughed Kirishima, still not feeling very comfortable about making any concrete statements on the matter. It was still very much up for debate whether his reading on this situation was correct or not, so he preferred to continue holding his tongue until he had a proper answer that was based on facts rather than feelings and vibes.

“H-Hold on, you mean you think they are…?” asked Kaminari, leaving

his question incomplete out of the sheer ridiculousness of such a possibility. However, on second thought, that sort of explanation was weirdly fitting when in association with those two specific individuals. “.....Why are they calling it a mission and not just dating for real, then?”

“I’ve been wanting to ask them that exact question since this past Monday…” admitted Kirishima after a rueful chuckle. He sighed. *“But you know how those two are. Denseness and emotional constipation mix as well as water and oil… The only reason I didn’t say anything about it when I was with them shortly after they announced their marriage was that I didn’t think it was my place to point that out. I think it will be less troublesome for everyone if they figure it out on their own than if someone interferes with their relationship… I mean, Todoroki would probably be more thankful for it than not, but Bakugou…? Yeah, that would go down terribly wrong…”*

“Never mind wrong, it would definitely doom any possibility of a real relationship from there onwards…” groaned Kaminari, inwardly cringing at the very high likelihood of that worst-case scenario. “Kacchan is the biggest contrarian in the world. If anyone tells him he’s into someone without him acknowledging it first, he will make it his life mission to deny it in any shape or form he can think of… And he’s smart as hell! He’d be able to think up all sorts of things we can’t even dream of!”

“Exactly, exactly. And since Bakugou’s so smart and can read anyone, even Todoroki, like an open book, we’d get caught in record time for interfering with their so-called unofficial mission,” added Kirishima with one more dose of resigned sighing. *“Since we’re both in agreement that would be absolutely terrible for whatever might happen from now on between the two of them, no more babbling about them to journalists and reporters, alright? I get that you were just trying to be helpful, but all you did in the end was put a huge target on your back. Luckily, you said what you said while under the assumption they’re faking all of this and not to try to set them up with one another for real. So I think we’re still in the clear with that. But be careful with your words and jokes from now on, okay?”*

“Ahaha… Y-Yeah…” nervously acknowledged Kaminari, sweat pouring out of every single pore in his body. For the second time that day, he was seeing his entire life flashing right before his eyes. Not because he was at risk of dying at this precise instant, but because he had come out unscathed from one hell of a close-call without even noticing it. *Thank god they interpreted my ‘wedding gift’ as the joke that it was and not as me hinting at something else… Todoroki said Bakugou destroyed it, so I think it’s fine. Yeah. It should be fine. I hope…*

“Welp, that’s all I wanted to say,” said Kirishima as the beginning statement to the conclusion of their phone call conversation. *“You now know what’s up, so good luck surviving the incoming torture session. Rest in pieces, as they say, ahahahaha!”*

“…I’m currently split between thinking I kinda deserve it this time, and wanting to do exactly what you told me to do when you first called me…” whimpered Kaminari, having already come to terms with what awaited him in the near future. He probably wouldn’t get tortured by his friend today or the next couple of days, as Bakugou definitely will want to use the remainder of his ‘honeymoon’ to further their investigation on the villain cult that worshipped him as a living god, but that didn’t change the fact that he was pretty much on borrowed time as of now…

“That’s what you get for not following Bakugou’s instructions down to a T,” chuckled Kirishima, part of him relieved that Kaminari was taking everything so well - maybe aside from the fact that he had one heck of a punishment about to come his way. Then again, Kaminari wasn’t one to stress over that sort of stuff, and he was a very supportive friend to both Bakugou and Todoroki, so no surprises there. *“Anywho, gotta get going. Need to get ready for one more very late work night.”*

“Keep up the great work out there~” said Kaminari, back to his chipper, happy-go-lucky self to deliver his parting words to his pal. Kirishima returned a ‘You too!’ to him before they finally ended their short phone call. As Kaminari stored his smartphone away and set off to continue with his rounds outside, he let out a long, tired sigh. “Man, talk about a blunder… Here I was thinking I had saved the day,

when in actuality, I nearly accidentally doomed an entire relationship… Twice, at that!”

He knew he couldn’t be too hard on himself for it, as he truly had no idea what had been happening behind the scenes of this whole unofficial mission and was only privy to the information that Bakugou leaked to them ahead of time and everything that was released to the public later on. Kaminari had greatly enjoyed and gotten a good laugh from those few instances where Todoroki straight-out kissed Bakugou right in front of the cameras, which at times resulted in hilarious unintended consequences. However, he thought it was simply a convenient gimmick they had come up with to seem more believable as a ‘couple’ after having suddenly announced their ‘marriage’. He had not even once considered the possibility that something more was quietly but steadily brewing underneath it all…

Until he saw the photos and videos released by those lucky enough to see the two of them out and about on their date, that is.

Back when he was first told about their plan, Kaminari had found it pretty strange, but also so very funny, that Todoroki had asked Bakugou to take on the role of his fake spouse. Even though this was two different ‘missions’ packaged into just one, and both of them had their individual goals and reasons, he still thought that someone like Bakugou wasn’t a credible ‘partner’ for someone like Todoroki, in all sorts of ways. They were okay friends and worked really well in a professional setting, but there was too big a mismatch between them, from personality to overall lifestyle.

Despite that, and all of the complaints and grumbling coming from Bakugou, Kaminari did notice they seemed weirdly keen on pursuing their ridiculous plan to con the entire world. Maybe *a bit too keen*, in hindsight. He eventually set that nagging feeling aside and assumed that a mix of stress, temporary insanity and a sprinkle of desperation was the main reason why they followed through with it a day after creating the whole scheme, but he was now backtracking on that conclusion.

There was no doubt that both Bakugou and Todoroki were under quite a lot of stress every single day, even before these new sets of challenges were added into the equation. It was also undeniable that the two of them were a bit of an oddball, maybe even on the crazier side if one looked really closely. And, of course, they had also admitted that their problems had sort of driven them into a corner after so many unsuccessful attempts at resolving them for good in a timely manner.

However - and this was one big ass however! -, none of that explained those photos or their willingness to act *this* obvious about their 'relationship'. Actually, Kaminari was starting to suspect they weren't even pretending anymore at this point, but simply behaving like they would have if they had been on a regular date with one another.

Wait… Wouldn't that mean that they are married for real… while thinking they aren't married for real…? That sort of thought suddenly crossed Kaminari's mind, much to his own self-inflicted confusion. It was such a convoluted prospect that he felt his brain grinding to a halt, perhaps to reboot itself and sort out that sticky mess. But for as asinine and backwards as that thought might have been, Kaminari felt that it was a very fitting assessment for this unconventional situation. *Aren't they supposed to be two of the smartest ones from our generation? How the hell did they end up making such a big mess out of something that is usually so straightforward? If they both like each other, and Todoroki wants to have full control of who ends up being his partner, while Bakugou wants to add more normalcy into his life as he goes about capturing those nutjobs… wouldn't it have been so much easier if they got together for real? That way, they wouldn't have to deal with the whole 'we need to convince everyone we've been dating for several years' process, because they could literally show the whole world their entire love story right from the very start instead! Argh, why are they so smart but also so damn stupid!?*

It was at times like this, and due to these nonsensical situations that seemed to constantly follow that particular duo, that Kaminari found himself questioning how exactly the two of them had made it alive up until now. Common sense seemed to be completely absent from their

livelihoods if this sort of crazy plan was the first thing that came to their mind when the time to deal with their feelings for one another finally arrived.

And if Kaminari felt like that, then he couldn't begin to imagine what a certain childhood friend was going through right about now…

-.-

We're done for… We, and the rest of the world, are all done for…

Such were Midoriya's wincing thoughts as he lay face down against his office desk, too mentally drained to pick himself up and sit straight. The wooden surface of the desk was cracked beyond repair, with a conspicuous blood-red stain painting the spiderweb-like fissures carved into it. Given the circumstantial evidence, it was quite obvious that Midoriya had spent the last tidbits of his energy ramming his head against the desk.

Of all possible scenarios, he had not expected that his death would be brought about due to the scandalous photos of his best friend and childhood friend out on a date that was anything but fake. But alas, here he was.

Earlier that week, Midoriya had already thought that Todoroki and Bakugou had taken things a step too far with all of those kisses right in front of the journalists and reporters, both during their press conference and outside. But since Todoroki had told him the kisses were being used as a last resort during key instances, Midoriya figured that they had all occurred because scoop-hungry correspondents were following them relentlessly.

Well, the 'couple of the week' had just spent an entire day proving

that wrong. To make it worse, they had been caught doing so from literally every possible angle and viewpoint.

How they can call this a mission with a straight face is beyond me…, Midoriya sobbed in the back of his mind, and not because of the pain radiating from his sore, blood-stained forehead. Even if he hadn't already talked at length with Todoroki about it and sort of gotten the gist of how he truly felt about Bakugou and their marriage, the photos and videos that had been taken of them today would have painted a very obvious picture of the actual truth - they weren't faking anything. *For some reason, Todoroki-kun and Kacchan have convinced themselves they are doing all of this for their mission and that everything will go back to how it used to be once they accomplish their goals. But honestly? They are being too naive! And too dense! So, so dense! Argh, why would they do something like this to themselves!?*

In all honesty, Midoriya was utterly baffled by the messy entanglement his two friends had created for themselves. They were usually so smart and levelheaded, easily recognised by the whole world as two of the most promising pro heroes of the newest generation. And yet, in this one topic, they were complete morons! (No offence…)

Todoroki had never said it outright during their conversations, but with the way he talked about Bakugou and their 'marriage of convenience', it was unmistakable that he was head over heels in love with his 'fake spouse'. And Bakugou couldn't be that far off himself, seeing as he was letting Todoroki get away with all of that without resorting to first-degree murder. All of that was leaving Midoriya completely stumped. If they were willing to go this far for a mission, which they claim they would not be able to partake in with anyone else but one another, shouldn't it have been crystal clear to them that they were simply using their individual problems as an excuse to be together?

Well, the answer to that was no. Unfortunately…

I risked my own neck and told Todoroki-kun as directly as possible that he should just date Kacchan instead of creating this intricate web of lies, but the denseness barrier was too strong and made all of my words bounce off into the nearest trash can… Midoriya sighed to his own buttons, slowly turning his bruised face against the cracked desk until he could lay it down sideways. Even that light movement made some more blood squirt out of the small cut on his forehead, which Midoriya couldn't even be bothered to treat and clean at the moment. *Todoroki-kun might be happy about how his relationship with Kacchan is going right now, but what will he do once they finish their unofficial mission? Is he going to do as promised and divorce Kacchan? Even though he enjoys being married to him this much? He probably will, since he's a man who always keeps his word… The thing is, that would definitely break his poor, innocent heart… I don't think I've ever seen him looking as happy as he did in those photos taken during their date… And Kacchan… Well, Kacchan is Kacchan, so that about says it all. If he didn't want to, he just wouldn't. Since he has, it probably means he wants to, too…*

Interfering with their 'mission' was simply not possible at this point in time, or so Midoriya had come to realise. This wasn't the kind of situation where those on the outside could just waltz in and fix. Even those directly in the eye of the storm seemed to be unable to fully control it any longer, as both Todoroki and Bakugou were, sadly, downright blind to their own feelings. The only thing Midoriya could realistically do was to keep a close eye on the two of them and pray they didn't needlessly complicate their own lives even further.

"Ahaha… Who am I trying to kid here? They've complicated things plenty already…" mumbled Midoriya, a hollow, lifeless laugh escaping from his lips as he finally forced himself to sit up straight at his office desk. With the track record they had so far, Midoriya could already see them making things even worse before they finally got the hang of their relationship, whatever name they decide to give it, and settled into a new normal. "The question now is… how bad will the fallout be…?"

Midoriya could only see two outcomes being created out of this. The first was, obviously, that things ended up working out for the two of them, even after they completed their individual goals. It would

certainly be one heck of a detour, but maybe being in a marriage of convenience would slowly make them see how much better they were as a married couple compared to simply being former classmates and current pro heroes on friendly terms. If they were truly in love with each other, that was the outcome that would make everyone the happiest, especially the couple in question.

The second outcome, however, was a bit trickier… It might sound absurd for pretty much anyone else, but there was a possibility that one of them - or even both - would go through the entire mission without ever realising their feelings. Bakugou and Todoroki were *that* bad when the topic of discussion was romantic relationships and emotions. Since they were currently stuck with this outrageous belief that they were only doing all of this for the sake of their unofficial mission and because of the leeway that their new label of 'married couple' gave them, it wasn't too far-fetched to think they could dismiss any changes they might experience as an unintentional side effect. In other words, they might misunderstand their very real feelings for each other as them also gaslighting themselves into thinking they are in love.

I mean, don't we hear all the time how actors who play as a couple in movies and TV shows often end up dating in the real world, only to later on realise they were simply mirroring the feelings of the characters they were portraying rather than actually being in love?, pointed out Midoriya in the back of his mind, quickly organising the scattered paperwork on top of his desk so it wouldn't get stained with his blood. *Todoroki-kun is so dense, and Kacchan is… well, Kacchan, so I'd say there's a pretty big chance they might end up thinking they faked their marriage so well that they even fooled themselves…*

Midoriya was probably being too pessimistic with that second possible outcome, but anything was possible with those two, for better or for worse. He wanted to be supportive and cheer them on, but he didn't have much faith in their emotional intelligence - not after they had proved themselves to be this blind to their feelings for one another while also being terrifyingly conspicuous about it. Even if they had not publicly announced their 'marriage' earlier that week, their 'relationship' would have become an open secret in record time thanks

to their latest public shenanigans.

"Ah, speaking of which…" mumbled Midoriya, his hands coming to a halt when he remembered a little something that he had been leaving aside due to having bigger fish to fry at the moment. "Since all of this is publicly accessible, that must mean that both Endeavor and the cult members after Kacchan can also see all of this happening in real time… right?"

Obviously, that was exactly the purpose of them being so open about their 'marriage' and going out on very public dates that left nothing about their 'lovey-dovey relationship' up to the imagination. However, Midoriya found that to be slightly worrying, nevertheless. Neither Endeavor nor the cult members were opponents to be trifled with. Today marked the 4th day since their big press conference and shocking announcement, which would have given either party ample time to make preparations for their next move. Endeavor would never do anything that could place either of them at risk, but the same couldn't be said about the cult members…

"I'm sure Endeavor must be trying to interfere with their relationship in his own way, but the fact that the villain group who worships Kacchan as a living god hasn't said so much as a single peep about their marriage announcement yet is, honestly, very worrying…" sighed Midoriya, feeling a bit frustrated at his powerlessness regarding that portion of the mission. To everyone's annoyance, the villain group was pretty skilled at staying hidden and only revealed themselves directly to the man they considered to be their leader and saviour. Midoriya had never interacted with any of the cult members who had been arrested so far, but he had heard about them from both Todoroki and Best Jeanist. "With how much they've been escalating their attempts at recruiting Kacchan, their current silence has to be the calm before the storm. They must be planning something big as we speak. But what exactly could it be, and how will they drag Kacchan directly into it…?"

Part of Midoriya hoped the villain group stayed where they were, as, let's be honest here, pro heroes also deserved to have vacations and

get some rest without being called in an emergency dispatch. If the villain group was going to cause some trouble, the least they could do was wait for their 'honeymoon' to be over. But that was probably too naive of Midoriya, and each second that went by peacefully meant that they were one second closer to the incoming, still unknown incident.

"Since I'm already here, I might as well do some digging online…" mumbled Midoriya under his breath, reaching out to one of the drawers of his desk and grabbing his work laptop from it. He set it up on top of the cracked desk and got down to work, putting both his analytical and sleuthing skills to good use. As Midoriya did his online investigation, he muttered, "I know they are really good at hiding all of their tracks, but there has to be some way for them to recruit more members into their group… That's just how cults work… They must also be using some sort of encrypted service to maintain a secure line of communication among themselves… Looking for that sort of thing would be a waste of time, though, so I won't even attempt to pursue that variant… But given how things work in modern times, social media platforms must be their go-to recruitment grounds… God knows how many nasty servers and group chats that use that sort of gateway access have been exposed as of late, thanks to brilliant investigative journalism and insider information…"

"Deku-san, about this repor- Wah!" yelped a staff member of the hero agency, startled immensely at the sight of Midoriya's blood-stained face the moment he stepped inside the pro hero's office. "W-What happened!? Are we under attack!?"

"Oh! S-Sorry, I'm okay…!" stammered Midoriya, only now realising how bad his current appearance might look to other people. He hurriedly grabbed a couple of tissues and started wiping his face while also adding some pressure to his forehead to stop the bleeding for good. The cut itself wasn't all that big, but as expected of a head injury, the blood just kept pouring out in a very overdramatic manner. To reassure his coworker that he was doing just fine, he ruefully smiled at him. "I accidentally banged my head against the desk with a bit too much strength, ahaha…"

“I-Is that so…?” hesitantly said the staff member, not quite sure what he was supposed to do in this kind of situation. He didn’t even know if now was a good time to ask the question that had brought him there to begin with, or if he should come back at a later time and allow the pro hero to recompose himself. He also wasn’t entirely sure whether breaking a desk with their head was normal pro hero behaviour, but he for sure wasn’t about to ask his coworker that…

“Do you need help with anything?” asked Midoriya, switching his gears back to work mode while also changing the topic. Unfortunately, he could not afford to focus solely on his friends’ problems or their inability to go about romance like a normal person. Nevertheless, he inwardly wept. *Ahhh, I’m so worried about Kacchan and Todoroki-kun… We’re done for… We, and the rest of the world, really are done for if they can’t get their stuff together…*

Chapter 55

“Ugh, we’re finally back home…” groaned Bakugou, feeling like he could breathe easy once again now that he was in a 100% safe space, far away from curious stares and camera flashes.

“I’m kinda surprised you told me to drive straight home instead of taking you to wherever Kaminari might be hiding,” chuckled Todoroki, closing the door behind themselves before he started taking his shoes off.

“That would be me going too easy on him,” scoffed Bakugou, taking his wallet and cell phone from his pocket and dropping them both on top of the kitchen counter as he walked deeper inside the living room area of the apartment. “I want him to live in constant fear for the next couple of days, never knowing when exactly I’ll be showing up to give him some good, old divine retribution.”

“If that’s how you treat your friends, I’m scared to know what you’d do to someone you hate…” deadpanned Todoroki, inwardly reminding himself to never get on Bakugou’s bad side, especially while they were living under the same roof.

“Heh, just ask Izuku, and he’ll tell you plenty of tales about that,” snickered Bakugou, the corner of his lips slowly curling into a mischievous smirk. “That is, if the trauma has softened to the point he can finally speak about it, hehehehe.”

“I’m okay with not knowing, after all,” said Todoroki, his face even more void of expression as he unilaterally decided to take a U-turn on that topic. He was still very much curious, but he also didn’t want to make his friend uncomfortable with such a (possibly heavy) conversation.

“Oh yeah? Great, that will make things even better for me,” noted Bakugou, the tone of his voice leisurely but still hinting at something deeper hiding underneath its thin surface. He sat down right in the middle of the spacious sofa, one of his arms resting on top of the backrest. “Now sit.”

“Okay,” acknowledged Todoroki, not thinking too much about it and walking up to the available space right next to Bakugou. But before he could even begin lowering his body, Bakugou changed his sitting position and placed one of his legs on the cushions Todoroki was about to take a seat on. He tilted his head and silently stared back at Bakugou. “...?”

“The floor’s all yours,” said Bakugou, pointing at the empty floor space by the low coffee table in front of the sofa with a small jerk of his chin. “And since you like everything Japanese so much, make sure you sit down seiza style. You’re tough enough to sit like that for the next hour or so without any floor cushions, right?”

“.....”

After that long stretch of silence, Todoroki let out a small sigh and slowly sat down on the floor, his legs folded underneath his thighs to take on the requested sitting position. Of course Bakugou had connected all the dots on his own and correctly guessed that Todoroki must have told Kaminari about their ‘fake date’ and its overall purpose. If Kaminari was currently on ‘death row’ for babbling to the journalists without his permission, it was only fair that Todoroki also got a lighter ‘sentence’ of his own, for having babbled to Kaminari without his permission. Adding that to all of those earlier kissing attempts at the aquarium, his deceitful trick to be the one paying for their lunch, and then the self-serving reason why he picked the movie that he did… Yeah, if Todoroki was yelled at for only one hour while in that uncomfortable sitting position, he’d be coming out of it relatively scot-free.

And yelled at, he certainly got. The moment Todoroki's body was neatly sitting on the floor, his back as straight as an arrow, while he silently stared back at his 'husband', Bakugou's demeanour changed from neutral to wrathful asura. Not just one, but the next two hours were spent with Bakugou grilling Todoroki over every little thing he had done throughout the day that he did not like, starting with having been so rudely grabbed and picked up after their little combat training session and ending with him having to waste all of this time scolding him.

Todoroki had no other choice but to dutifully listen to the whole thing without any complaints of his own. He had told Bakugou several times that he was willing to take on any 'punishments' he might deem fitting for as long as he could have his way throughout the fake date, and he intended to keep his word on that. His dinner was guaranteed thanks to their food arrangement, even if it might come out a bit spicier than he would have liked, so really, did Todoroki even have anything to fear over this 'punishment'? The worst thing he got out of it was some soreness in his lower legs, from being pressed directly against the floor for two hours in a row, which was still nothing in comparison to the after-effects of a tough day at work.

Once Bakugou had said everything he had wanted to say, his wrathful asura demeanour was promptly dropped, and he returned to his usual moody frown. The scolding had helped him vent his frustrations just as much as it had worked as a suitable penalty to his 'husband', so he felt a whole lot better, even though he had pretty much been speaking non-stop throughout the entire thing.

"Alright, it's time I get started with dinner," announced Bakugou completely unprompted as he got up from his cushy seat on the sofa. He still wasn't hungry per se, but he might as well make the rest of the day worth his while. "Be ready to stand in the kitchen for a good while once I'm done changing out of these clothes."

"Okay," said Todoroki, his very first word after being as silent as a mouse for the last two hours. He quietly followed Bakugou with his gaze as he went into his bedroom, and only then did he breathe out a

small sigh. *I guess I really did manage to survive this one… It was a longer scolding than I thought it would be, but well, it was totally worth it after such a nice 'date'.*

After sitting seiza style for so long, Todoroki had to get up really slowly, making sure he didn't pull a muscle in his legs or injure himself in any other way. With a bit of light stretching, his body quickly returned to normal, though.

If he were to base himself on Bakugou's short instructions, they probably weren't going to leave their apartment anymore for the day. Todoroki was more than okay with that. They had (or, at the very least, he certainly had) enjoyed their time outside plenty, but the occasional interruptions and having that many eyes constantly on them were also quite unnerving. Even if they were used to the attention, their current circumstances didn't leave them much room to relax properly in public. So being able to spend some quality alone time with Bakugou in the safety of their apartment sounded almost as good as the fake date itself had been.

I should also change to something more comfortable, noted Todoroki to his own buttons as he glanced down at his clothes. Bakugou still wasn't back from his bedroom, so he used this small intermission as his opportunity to also get changed. He couldn't have been gone from the living room area for longer than five minutes, but by the time Todoroki got out of his bedroom, Bakugou was already busying himself with some stuff around the kitchen. He walked up to him while still uncertain of what his purpose would be there this time around. "Do you need help with anything?"

"…You just never learn, do you?" groaned Bakugou, so sick and tired of hearing that grating question every single time he was in the middle of doing something. "Forget cooking training. What you really need to work on is how to keep your mouth shut."

"I was just trying to be polite. You don't need to read too much into

it," deadpanned Todoroki, even though he knew this was his cue to 'keep his mouth shut'. Before Bakugou could hiss at him some more, he added in an attempt to change the topic. "What's tonight's dinner?"

"...A certain someone bought a bunch of random stuff while trying to cheat with the shopping list, so now I have to do something about that before they go to waste…" grumbled Bakugou, no longer in the mood to bicker on and off with someone denser than a rock - though that did little to nothing to diminish the intensity and dexterity of his sarcastic remarks.

"Ah, that," said Todoroki, easily recognising a few of the ingredients that Bakugou was gathering on the kitchen counter as items he had personally added to their shopping basket during the 'cheating shopping list' incident. "You're a good cook. I'm sure you can come up with something good."

"Yeah, no shit, Sherlock!" scoffed Bakugou while rolling his eyes at that obnoxiously obvious statement. "But that doesn't change the fact that it's a pain in the ass. It gave me all the answers I wanted, but it's still annoying."

"The answers you wanted?" asked Todoroki, his head slightly tilted.

"I wanted to check how much I need to micromanage your shopping habits," Bakugou started explaining just as he was finishing off the ingredient gathering stage. "Between you cheating and trying to hide you were cheating, the answer is pretty darn obvious. You follow my grocery shopping lists down to a T from now on, or you're gonna be out of dinner that night."

"Were there any issues with the things I picked?" wondered Todoroki out loud, not quite understanding what kind of problem Bakugou had with the things he had bought. As far as he was aware, they had been

pretty basic ingredients, for the most part. Some of them were even inspired by what Bakugou had already cooked for them before.

“Hah, spoken like someone who has zero cooking skills,” snorted Bakugou as he leaned his back against the kitchen counter. He pointed with his thumb at the items he was about to use. “Listen, you don’t just randomly grab stuff from the shelves just because you recognise them or because you think they are a good deal. That’s how you end up wasting both your money and perfectly good food. You first check what you already have lying around at home, especially the stuff that is about to go bad, and then plan accordingly. To explain it in a way that even an idiot like you might understand… Yeah, just think of it like when you’re getting ready for a mission. You first review the information you were provided with, and then plan according to the manpower you already have available, right? If you still need extra help to meet your goals, you then go get it elsewhere by requesting a team-up with some other agency or pro hero.”

“Oh. I see,” acknowledged Todoroki with a small nod of his head. Seeing it from that perspective, he had definitely gone about the grocery shopping in the wrong, wasteful way. “It was no wonder you told me to check the kitchen and the stuff in it before we left for the grocery store.”

“Are you starting to realise how dumb your current living style is and why your daddy dearest wants to force an ‘ideal bride’ on you?” snickered Bakugou, enjoying immensely the moment that realisation dawned on Todoroki, even though his ‘husband’ probably wasn’t fully aware of how bad he truly was at doing this ‘living alone’ thing just yet. “It’s all about management skills. If you’re good at it in your private life, you’ll also be good at it in your professional life. However! That doesn’t mean it works both ways! There are plenty of idiots out there who are good at their jobs, but totally useless whenever they’re off the clock. Like you! So stop half-assing your private life and give it a bit more thought and planning from now on. Understood?”

“Okay,” said Todoroki, once again nodding his head in

acknowledgement to Bakugou's forceful but particularly wise words. Extending what he already did at work at home, too, would be quite the chore, especially with his rather relaxed attitude to that sort of thing. But if he wanted this 'mission' with Bakugou to work in the long run and permanently get rid of the arranged marriage offers, he needed to do his best patching up certain aspects of his daily life. Being a bit more pragmatic about his grocery shopping habits would be a bit of an adjustment, but one that would definitely improve his quality of life tenfold if done correctly. "You said to plan things ahead of time while at home, rather than while at the grocery store, right? Does that mean you never take any discounts or sales into consideration?"

"I do, but that's way too advanced for a total newb like you," noted Bakugou with a dismissive shrug of his shoulders. "Focus on the basics for now. We'll level you up once you master the easy, simple version."

"In that case, what should I do if I accidentally mess up the grocery shopping, like I did last time?" asked Todoroki next, getting more and more eager to move on to the more practical portion of the cooking crash course - for one very good reason, of course.

"First, you apologise for how much of a brainless idiot you are," instructed Bakugou, the serious expression on his face hinting that he absolutely meant what he was saying and was now waiting for precisely that.

"I'm sorry," Todoroki promptly apologised, even though he was deadpanning his deadpan. He was aware of the futility of fighting his 'spouse' on this, though, so he just rolled with it for the time being.

"Then you have two options ahead of you," continued Bakugou, now that he had gotten that sugary-sweet sentence that he was after, even though he had to ignore the lack of sincerity behind it. "The first one is simple: you somehow wing it. That's the option you should *NOT* go for until you have a good understanding of cooking in general. Plenty

of people think they can randomly tweak recipes here and there to use the stuff they have around, and that it will work out in the end, but there are also plenty of people who absolutely suck at cooking, and it shows. If you're like me, though, it kinda works out in the end, like when I was forced to cook in your absurdly bare kitchen."

"I'm sorry about that too," deadpanned Todoroki, apologising preemptively, just in case his 'husband' was thinking about going for a second round of that. "The food you made still turned out pretty good, though. It wasn't as good as the real version, but good nevertheless."

"I keep telling you that compliments won't take you anywhere," scoffed Bakugou, despite the very pleased look on his face. "The second option is the one you should keep in mind. It's also pretty darn easy, so even incompetent newbs can do it well, so long as they don't half-ass anything. You take note of what you bought by accident, then think up an easy dish you can make out of it, and rush to the nearest grocery store to buy what you're missing. Then you cook it. The end."

"Eh? That's it?" asked Todoroki, a bit surprised that the second option was so underwhelming.

"This isn't rocket science. Of course, that's it," sighed Bakugou while rolling his eyes at Todoroki's dumbfounded reaction. "Or what, did you think I'd tell you to invent a new dish or something? When you mess up, the easiest way to correct that mistake is to revert to what you already know how to do right. So if you buy, let's say, too many eggs and need to use them ASAP, just make an omelette or go crazy with the egg drop soup. If you have too much meat, do a stew with it, which you can just leave slow-cooking on the stove while you try to find where you left your brain while you were out grocery shopping. That kind of stuff, yeah? If it's not complicated, then don't complicate it! Got it?"

"That… actually makes quite a lot of sense, yeah," noted Todoroki, slowly nodding his head as he thought about that some more. It was

such a simple solution that he was surprised it hadn't been the first thing crossing his mind. It certainly showed how badly Todoroki was accustomed to having to deal with that sort of situation - which, in other words, meant that his lack of experience in his daily life had, at some point, turned into a lack of common sense.

"The fact you're having a full-blown moment of clarity with something so basic is really putting into perspective why Endeavor is so dead set on finding you a full-time caretaker," Bakugou sighed yet again while rubbing his temple with the pads of his fingers. He already knew it would be one heck of a headache to get Todoroki to a self-sufficient level that earned Endeavor's approval within that short deadline. But if this was the level he was at right now, he might as well quit ahead of time and find a way to cheat himself into a victory.

"I can do this just fine on my own. I don't need a full-time caretaker or 'ideal bride'," grumbled Todoroki, his competitive streak getting slightly nudged by that last remark. It was one thing to have Bakugou with him and share the burden of their daily lives by splitting the chores, but Todoroki believed he was perfectly capable of doing things the right way without the support of others, if it came to that.

"Go ahead and prove it, then," scoffed Bakugou with a dismissive shrug of his shoulders. "Once we go back to work, you'll have plenty of time to show me, and your father, of course, that you're capable of doing something as simple as grocery shopping all on your own. Without messing up. Even once. Still think you can do it?"

"Yeah," Todoroki claimed with a resolute nod of his head, even when he was falling victim to his 'husband's' very doubtful stare. "I'll do it well all the time from now on."

"Alright, alright," said Bakugou while rolling his eyes at Todoroki's fervent declaration. He wasn't all that worried about botched grocery store runs for the time being, as he intended to send Todoroki a shopping list whenever necessary, but he also couldn't baby him

throughout the entirety of their 'mission'. The shopping lists made by him would have to be phased out at some point and replaced by ones created by Todoroki himself. But until then, there was a whole lot more that he needed his useless 'spouse' to learn. "Anyway, that's enough about grocery shopping. Let's move on with dinner itself."

"Okay," acknowledged Todoroki, so very happy that they were finally getting to the actual main course (no pun intended). Without thinking twice, Todoroki immediately glued himself to Bakugou's back, his arms wrapped around his torso in a way that wouldn't restrict his movements.

"Grrr… I'm doing this for my future sainthood… I'm doing this for my future sainthood…" Bakugou grumbled under his breath, repeating that same chant a couple of times to calm himself down (and his slightly faster heartbeat). He still planned on kicking Todoroki out of there and away from him at the smallest of inconveniences, but the damned human-koala was getting way too good at not getting in his way as he went about cooking. Even though he really, really, *really* hated it, Bakugou had no choice but to raise the white flag and let Todoroki do whatever made him actually focus on learning normal life skills. "I usually multitask several dishes, but since we have the time and multitasking is too much for your incompetent ass, I'm gonna do everything today one by one. Be sure to pay attention, cuz I will definitely be quizzing you afterwards. Do you have any questions before we start?"

"No, go right ahead," said Todoroki as he leaned his chin on top of Bakugou's shoulder. Despite his 'husband's' hissy intensity and grumbles, Todoroki couldn't have looked more relaxed while in that kind of position.

Much like Bakugou had pointed out, they did have quite a lot of time until the stereotypical dinnertime arrived. They started with not only basic but also more time-consuming tasks, which, in their case, were the prep work and cooking time for the rice. Todoroki obviously already knew how to make rice using a rice cooker, including the prep. So to build upon that, he upgraded their white rice for that night

to green pea rice. It was still made using the rice cooker, which made it fairly straightforward to teach Todoroki, regardless of his current cooking skills.

With the green pea rice cooking independently, they moved on to the main protein dish (according to Bakugou's educational explanation, at least). During the grocery shopping 'psychological torture', Todoroki had added both sliced beef and carrots to their basket as a buffer. Much like Todoroki had figured back then, Bakugou quickly came up with a good use for both of them by making carrot beef rolls glazed with teriyaki sauce. The more popular version had both green beans and carrots, but this was one of those dishes that could be easily adjusted depending on the vegetables one had in stock. Bakugou filled Todoroki in on all of those different versions as he slowly cooked the beef rolls step by step. He also made sure to use the entire package of sliced beef, throwing in a bonus lesson on how to safely store any leftovers in the fridge or the freezer.

Next came the first side dish of the night, which was also a special request that Todoroki had asked of Bakugou. He had really enjoyed the bean sprouts salad he had made earlier that week and wanted to learn how to make it. It was both easy and quick to make, and they had everything they needed at hand, so Bakugou saw no reason to turn down that request. He was getting kind of tired of his 'husband's' tamer taste in food, though, so he divided the bean sprouts salad in two and turned half of it into a spicy variant of the same dish. Obviously, he used this opportunity to teach Todoroki about the importance of accurately labelling any food containers in the fridge or freezer, so no one would end up in the hospital after eating something too spicy for their weak-ass stomach to handle. Todoroki understood that indirect warning loud and clear, much to his own amusement.

Another thing that deeply entertained Todoroki was the last two dishes they prepared. Because of the overall reason that had brought them to the restaurant they picked for their fake date, Todoroki had been left under the impression that his 'husband' was itching to give some of them a try himself. That feeling turned out to be totally correct, as the two other side dishes that Bakugou taught him were simmered fried tofu and greens, and miso soup with tofu and wakame.

Those had been two of the dishes in the meal set that Todoroki had eaten and personally handfed to Bakugou.

Bakugou would never say it out loud, but he probably is competing against the chefs from that restaurant and wants to make those dishes even better than them, Todoroki chuckled to himself, carefully listening to his 'husband' as he told him all about the right way of making miso soup. He wasn't entirely sure if Bakugou was purposely fishing for compliments or if the competition was more of a one-sided test of his own culinary skills. What Todoroki did know, however, was that he could not half-ass his assessment of those two dishes once he ate them. His opinion and overall evaluation of them would have to be genuine and straightforward, with no exaggeration or patronising remarks. Honesty *was* the best policy whenever Bakugou was concerned, after all. *Well, even when we were eating at the restaurant, I thought that Bakugou's food was way better than the chef's. I might not understand why, but my mouth and stomach tell me I'm right. So I'm not worried about this too much.*

For someone as direct as Todoroki was, giving an honest review was not an issue. Bakugou's reaction to it might be, in itself, but not what came out of Todoroki's mouth - or so his denseness made him believe. Plus, Bakugou might go on and on about how complimenting him wouldn't change anything, but he did look particularly pleased whenever Todoroki praised him in some way, especially when it came to his food. He would never be as honest about it, but Bakugou seemed to be quite proud of how good he had become at cooking.

With their slow cooking pace, by the time the miso soup was done, it was finally time for them to chow down. Bakugou might or might not have intended for things to go that way right from the start. While Todoroki went to get all the plates, bowls and cutlery they would need, Bakugou started reheating the dishes that had already gone cold. The plating was obviously done by Bakugou, as he couldn't leave such a sensitive task in the clumsy, destructive hands of his fake husband.

"Thanks for the food," said Todoroki to show his gratitude, both of

them sitting at their regular spots at the dining table. After standing in the kitchen glued to Bakugou's body for so long, it was nice to finally get a taste of the fruits of all their labour - even though Todoroki's contribution to their dinner was basically his random grocery store picks and the request for bean sprouts salad.

Bakugou simply hummed at it and began eating without too much ceremony.

Yeah, I really do like his food the best, Todoroki concluded in the back of his mind after just a handful of bites of his dinner. He still couldn't put it into words all that well, but something about Bakugou's cooking simply clicked with him in a way no other had so far. It went without saying that Bakugou wasn't cooking for him, per se, or doing something special on purpose; Todoroki had literally been watching him cooking for the last couple of days, so he knew that for sure, even with his limited knowledge. But between Bakugou's home-cooked meals and the food made by any other person on Earth - his family included -, Todoroki was certain he would always choose and like Bakugou's the best. *I really wonder why that is… It can't be a matter of cooking experience, as I've eaten food prepared by people who have been cooking for way longer than we've been alive. It isn't the ingredients used either, since they are from a regular grocery store and not even from very expensive brands.*

Todoroki really would have liked to continue musing about that big mystery, but he also couldn't afford to get too lost in his own thoughts. The food was far too good and precious for him to mindlessly consume it without paying it much attention. He was going to savour every single bite of it, down to the very last grain of rice. Todoroki was also going to let Bakugou know of his true opinion on it, of course.

"I might not be a very reliable food critic, but I think you cooked them better," said Todoroki while gesturing with his chopsticks to both the miso soup and the simmered fried tofu and greens.

“Thanks for stating the obvious…” grumbled Bakugou before he shoved half of a beef roll into his mouth and ‘angrily’ chewed it. “Be sure to engrave the flavour into your dense brain so you know what good food actually tastes like when the time for you to cook them yourself comes.”

“That won’t be an issue, don’t worry,” deadpanned Todoroki with a quick thumbs-up. After getting a taste of Bakugou’s cooking, there was just no way he’d be able to forget the optimal flavour of a particular dish. If anything, his taste in food was getting narrowed down to a dangerous degree, as all other food wholeheartedly paled in comparison. That was when Todoroki noticed a certain flaw in their current plans. “Oh. But wouldn’t that mean……”

“What?” asked Bakugou, a light frown appearing on his face as he intently watched as Todoroki’s sentence vanished into a contemplative silence.

“Are you going to stop cooking for me once I learn how to do it on my own?” asked Todoroki, going straight for the crux of the matter. They currently had this food deal, and Bakugou was going out of his way to teach him how to cook and do other house chores as part of his side of their unofficial mission. But that was a purely temporary agreement. It wasn’t a permanent feature for their ‘mission’, let alone for the rest of their lives. That meant that Todoroki was at a serious risk of never being able to eat Bakugou’s home-cooked meals again in a matter of months. For someone who liked to eat the food made by Bakugou as much as Todoroki did and could very well be on the brink of getting so into it that all other food ended up being kind of meh… *Yeah, that would definitely be a huge problem…*

“Huh? How else would you get the practice needed to make actual edible food consistently?” pointed out Bakugou, not understanding why he had to state the obvious once again this late in the game. Surprisingly, the overall demeanour on Todoroki’s face went from his usual expressionlessness to utter heartbreak. “Why the hell are you looking at me like I just said I was gonna make you sacrifice a bunch of puppies and kittens to the cooking gods? If you don’t practice, you

won't get good at it. You're still in the theoretical phase of your 'living alone 101' studies, but there will come a day when you will make your own food. And when that time comes, why would I continue making food for you, too?"

That's impossible. That was what Todoroki would have liked to say out loud. Yes, he recognised how important knowing how to cook was. He needed that life skill if he wanted to get Enji to drop the 'ideal bride' arranged marriage offers for good. For the sake of having a stable livelihood, no matter the circumstances around him, Todoroki *had* to learn how to keep himself well-fed and healthy.

But Todoroki also wanted to continue eating Bakugou's food, both now and in the future. As frequently as it was humanly possible for both of them and their busy pro hero schedules, at that. Now that he had acknowledged to himself how much he liked it, Todoroki simply couldn't imagine himself surviving for very long without it.

"Huh… Maybe it really is true that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach," noted Todoroki, this time unmistakably with his outward voice. His stomach was certainly smitten after just a couple of days of eating Bakugou's home-cooked meals, so whoever had first said that might have been onto something there. But on the other hand, it's not like he had ever felt such a strong attachment to someone else's cooking just because the food was mouth-wateringly delicious. Again, Bakugou's food just had something to it that made it the exception of all exceptions as far as Todoroki was concerned.

Never before had Bakugou choked on his food as quickly as he did at that precise moment. The statement he had just heard and the straightforward, serious manner in which it had been spoken were *that* outrageous.

"Are you kidding me? If that was true, everyone would be head over heels with the old ladies from the school cafeterias and random restaurant chefs whose faces they hadn't seen even once before,"

Bakugou pointed out once he dislodged the piece of food that had almost gone down the wrong pipe. You might have already clued into it, but his brain did not connect Todoroki's daring remark with their current food arrangement. Go figure…

"Oh, you're right. I guess that must just be one of those popular sayings spread around through the power of fiction," said Todoroki after being 'counterattacked' so readily. He, too, did not connect the daring content of his own statement with his (already admittedly intense) fixation on preserving the daily life they had created for their marriage of convenience. Again, go figure… "Still, not eating your food anymore just because I'll be able to make some simple dishes on my own is a bit… I don't like the thought of that all that much, to be honest."

"Hey, you managed to live your entire life without my food up until now. You can continue doing exactly that, but in an even better way once you know how to make it all on your own," remarked Bakugou as he resumed with his dinner. His crimson gaze tightened into a slight glare as he added, however. "Plus, I ain't your goddamned babysitter or caretaker. I'm only feeding you until I know you won't burn down my new kitchen. You're on your own once you aren't a cooking trainwreck that is more of a liability than a bull in a freakin' china shop."

"I could spend my whole life from here on out cooking, and I still wouldn't be able to make food as good as yours," deadpanned Todoroki, his words not even meant as an ingratiating compliment. He was simply stating the obvious in the most honest way possible.

"Hah, you're right about that," snorted Bakugou, his glare softening into a knowing smirk oozing hubris.

"So can't I learn how to cook from you while continuing to eat your food every day?" suggested Todoroki, stubbornly trying to keep that door of possibilities open despite Bakugou's insistence on slamming it

shut right before his eyes. “You said there’s no need for that, but there’s also no reason not to, right? I also remember you saying there’s little to no difference in making food for one or two people. Can’t I cook a few simple dishes per week, and the rest gets cooked by you?”

“Greedy much!?” hissed Bakugou, his face once again getting all scrunched up with a frown thanks to the balls of that dense moron. “And then I’m the selfish, self-centred one!”

“That’s just how much I love your food,” admitted Todoroki before he calmly sipped on that delicious miso soup.

“Grrr…” What was Bakugou even supposed to say to a proclamation like *that*? For as expressionless as his current flatmate might be, he was still an expert at reading other people. Bakugou knew he could keep saying no for the rest of his life, and Todoroki would still continue begging him for food all the way to his very last breath. *I’m starting to feel like I fed a stray cat once or twice on a whim, and now the damn bugger won’t leave me the hell alone!*

Oh? Could it be that he’s on the verge of caving in? Todoroki wondered in the back of his mind, slightly surprised by the extremely tame growling that ended up being Bakugou’s sole response. Usually, this was the part when Bakugou would defiantly and very stubbornly hold his ground, until the opposing party was ready to give up and accept their loss. But this mild reaction gave Todoroki the impression that Bakugou wasn't actually that opposed to the idea, and that his inherent pigheadedness was the only thing holding him back from saying yes instantly. *Ah, in that case…*

“Please?” Todoroki said a single word, the expressionless tone of his voice still carrying a beckoning cadence. Doing too much just as he was about to reach his goal would be a disservice. Why prod and nudge the lion just as it had lain back down and was allowing him safe passage? So Todoroki summarised his intentions and condensed them into the one word that could have a chance of working on his

moody ‘husband’.

“……Keep eating, or else your food is gonna go cold and get its flavour ruined……” grumbled Bakugou before he begrudgingly dropped his gaze back down to his dinner and stuffed a bunch of green pea rice down the hatch.

It was a resounding victory for Todoroki and his domesticated stomach.

Chapter 56

Okay, now that we're done with all tasks for today and Bakugou has fully cooled down from that earlier tongue-lashing, I think it's about time I move forward with something else, Todoroki told himself in the back of his mind as he dried his hands with a kitchen towel, freshly done with cleaning up after their peaceful (and absolutely delicious) dinner.

When he turned away from the kitchen sink and faced the living room area, Todoroki easily spotted his 'target' leisurely sitting on the sofa. According to what he had been told while they were eating, Bakugou planned to write down all the stuff he had been teaching Todoroki these past couple of days, so he wouldn't have to keep repeating himself whenever his 'brainless, incompetent husband' (Bakugou's words, not his) forgot about something. That was exactly what Bakugou had been doing the entire time Todoroki had been washing the dishes and storing other cookware back in their rightful places. Knowing Bakugou and how good he was at teaching others, Todoroki just knew that notebook was going to be a treasure trove of information and a sure-fire way of not annoying his 'spouse' with question after question.

After making sure to 'neatly' fold the damp kitchen towel rather than randomly leaving it on the kitchen counter (yes, slowly but surely, he was following Bakugou's instructions of being more mindful and intentional about his private life too), Todoroki made a beeline straight towards the sofa - perhaps a bit too straightforwardly and eagerly, as his zooming speed ended up catching Bakugou's attention the moment he came into his field of view.

Ah. This might be bad. That was the first thought that crossed Bakugou's mind the moment he saw Todoroki coming towards him like a bull rushing towards a red flag. His sixth sense pinged so hard at that sight that, had he not been in the safe space of his own home, Bakugou would have 100% immediately switched to battle mode and preemptively exploded with the perceived threat. But since this was Todoroki he was dealing with here, there was no need for such extreme measures. Bakugou simply slapped the notebook and pen on

the coffee table in front of the sofa and got ready to get the hell out of there ASAP.

He was too late, however.

Todoroki saw no problem with rushing even more and straight-out tackled Bakugou against the sofa to prevent him from running away. His (rightful) anger would be a whole lot easier to deal with than getting him outside his room after he had gone into hiding. While yes, Todoroki could wait until the next day if that ended up happening, he still wanted to get this 'situation' dealt with now rather than later.

"Argh! You also need to work on this fucking annoying habit of yours!" screeched Bakugou, wiggling his body around to try to break free from Todoroki's tight bear hug and tackle. "Just stop manhandling me or picking me up or pinning me down against any surface you can find!!!"

"It's the easiest way to prevent you from running away, though," pointed out Todoroki with a seemingly innocent tilt of his head. There weren't any bad or dubious intentions behind instances like this one; he was simply being practical with his approach.

"I DON'T RUN AWAY!" roared Bakugou, getting even more huffy-puffy after being hit with such a nonsensical accusation. He hadn't run away even once in his entire life. At most, he had performed some tactical retreats here and there, or picked his battles to save himself from wasting his time or getting annoyed at someone else's stupidity. But running away? Never!

"According to the dictionary and its definition of the verb 'to run away', you have done that quite a lot whenever you don't want to talk about something," deadpanned Todoroki, using his characteristic inability to read the room to insist on his prior statement and defend

his actions.

“Ah, yes, ‘cuz you’re sooo good at semantics and understanding regular, everyday speech,” scoffed Bakugou with a roll of his eyes, his voice dripping with sarcasm. That, too, obviously swooshed right past Todoroki’s brain.

“Yeah, I’ve also been working on that,” acknowledged Todoroki with a small nod of his head.

“Just get off of me already, will you!?” hissed Bakugou, officially done with that entire bickering conversation. He somehow managed to wiggle one of his arms free from Todoroki’s crushing bear hug and used his hand to push Todoroki’s head away, but that was about it.

“If you promise not to run away the moment I let go and hear me out until the end, I will,” said Todoroki, willing to compromise a bit so long as his ‘spouse’ was also willing to work with him.

“Yeah, yeah, cross my heart or whatever,” groaned Bakugou in exasperation, still not letting off with the head pushing, just in case.

Having obtained a satisfactory answer, Todoroki finally let go of Bakugou and sat up straight on the sofa. The back of his head was slapped hard the moment Bakugou could freely move once again as retaliation, but that made it sound way more painful than it had actually been. In his own way, Bakugou must have gone easy on him.

“So? What now?” asked Bakugou, his gaze tightening into two suspicious, thin slits. If Todoroki had to take such extreme measures to make sure he wouldn’t leave mid-conversation, it was because he knew that what he wanted to discuss would make Bakugou want to clock him in the face at one point or another. All in all, he could only

expect yet another aggravating conversation to come his way.

"I'm not entirely sure how to say this, since you already said 'no' to it once, but I still kinda want to try it out," Todoroki started while inserting his hand inside his pants' pocket. From there, he fished out the wedding ring they had gotten earlier at the jewellery store. Yes, Todoroki had still not put the ring on, as he felt it wasn't right to do it himself. "I know our marriage is just out of convenience and a temporary thing, but I still want to do the ring exchange thing."

"Why? Like you said, it's not like we're married for real," sighed Bakugou, inwardly cursing the day he decided to say 'yes' to this whole plan instead of taking Todoroki straight to the hospital so he could have a mental health evaluation. "Plus, I'm pretty darn sure that ring exchange stuff only happens when you get married through a church or some other religious institution connected to it. We had a courthouse wedding, if it can even be called that."

"Yeah, but think about it," said Todoroki, his expressionless demeanour getting a more serious undertone to it. "If we still did the ring exchange thing with these specific rings, that would royally piss off my father once he learns about it. The rings themselves are far more special and meaningful than your regular wedding bands, which is already 'bad' enough as it is. But then having you being the one to put it on my finger? Yeah, he's going to lose it the day I have to tell him about it."

"Pfft! Ahahahahahaha!" Out of everything crossing through Bakugou's mind at the moment, that certainly had not been one of the bullshit reasons he was counting on hearing. He was thinking that Todoroki would say something along the lines of, being curious about it and wanting to try it out since he didn't plan on getting actually married in the future, or even that he wanted to follow the usual 'wedding/ marriage rules' (whatever that even meant) out of a silly goodie-two-shoes sense of obligation and honour. But *this*? What else but laugh his ass off could Bakugou do at the moment? "So it's all about wanting to torture Endeavor in the pettiest way you can think of, huh?"

“I mean, not exactly, but it’s a big portion of it, yeah,” confessed Todoroki with a more reserved nod of his head. He did find the thought of doing this sort of thing with Bakugou to be appealing in more ways than just getting back at his father, but he doubted that mentioning them would help his case much…

“Alright. I can get behind something like that,” said Bakugou, the corner of his lips slowly tilting upwards to shape a mischievous smirk. He pulled the ring off his ring finger and proceeded to give it back to Todoroki without putting much forethought into it. Getting some petty payback on the guy who had been getting on his nerves as of late was all the reason he needed to get on board with an otherwise annoying ring exchange. Bakugou then motioned both of his hands towards Todoroki, one palm-side facing down so his ‘husband’ could put the ring back on his finger and the other palm-side up to receive the wedding ring he was supposed to put on Todoroki’s. “Hurry it up so we can get done with this topic once and for all. I’m still not done writing down everything I taught you today.”

“Oh. Okay.” Todoroki was so surprised it was *this easy* to convince Bakugou into willingly participating in a makeshift wedding ring exchange that he ended up freezing and staring dumbfounded at his ‘husband’ for a good while, only realising he was doing so when called out on it. *That jeweller must be really good at people-watching… Who knew it could be this simple to get Bakugou to cooperate with something just by changing the location to a private space and providing a single reasonable argument as additional backup… I should keep this strategy in mind from now on.*

Not wanting to waste this opportunity that he had been so smoothly granted, Todoroki got down to brass tacks and gave his ring to Bakugou while adjusting his hold on the one he had been provided with. It was a rather simple ring exchange, one that didn’t take more than a handful of seconds to be completed - mainly because he didn’t have Bakugou fighting him during every single step of the way. To some people, it might have been a very underwhelming exchange, especially when compared with the stereotypical event in wedding

ceremonies. But for Todoroki, the essence of the wedding ring exchange had been met, and that was all that mattered to him. He could now say with his full chest that he had been the one to put a ring on Bakugou's ring finger.

"I've never actually worn any rings, so it feels kinda weird…" commented Todoroki as he stared at his own hand and the golden band now neatly located on the base of his ring finger. The coldness of the gold-like ring soon melted into the same body temperature as he had, but the feel of it remained as it was, constantly reminding him it was right there on his hand. In a way, that weight was quite reassuring. Since he wasn't used to wearing rings, he didn't know how easy it was to lose them, all the more so in an environment as busy and chaotic as the one he worked at.

"Hey, you were the one who wanted to do this, so don't complain now!" hissed Bakugou, negatively interpreting that flimsy mumble.

"I'm not complaining. I'm just saying I'm not used to it," said Todoroki, adding a reassuring thumbs-up with his follow-up statement. "I'm sure I'll be by the end of tomorrow, though."

"Hmph!" Bakugou simply scoffed at that with his usual moody predisposition and went to grab the notebook and pen he had dropped on the coffee table, which he readily opened on the page where he had left off.

"What about you? Are you okay with it?" asked Todoroki. It was probably a bit too late to be asking something like this now, especially with how adamant Bakugou had been at the jewellery store. But since consent could be withdrawn at any time, he preferred to double-check on its current status now and then.

"I wouldn't be wearing it if I wasn't," Bakugou grumbled, his pouty

demeanour becoming even more scrunched up. Even his writing speed changed a bit at it, becoming more annoyed and forceful. “So long as it doesn’t get in the way of my day-to-day life or pro hero activities, it can stay where it is. But the moment it starts interfering with anything whatsoever, I’m flushing it down the closest toilet.”

“I’m not sure if that would be very safe for the piping,” pointed out Todoroki, his head slightly tilted as he considered that plan. It was well-known that toilet paper was the only item that should be flushed down the toilet. An indestructible ring down those pipes could very well have devastating consequences for the infrastructure in question.

“Fine, I’ll just chuck it into a nearby river or something,” groaned Bakugou while rolling his eyes at his ‘husband’s’ inability to understand doublespeak and sarcasm. Where had that earlier ‘I’m getting better at words’ gone, exactly?

“That could also be very dangerous, ecologically speaking,” noted Todoroki, softly nodding his head to his own words. A bird or some fish could end up swallowing the ring, thinking it was food. Given that the ring was technically a Quirk, the effect it would have on an animal’s body was simply unknown and not something Todoroki wanted to find out about the hard way - doubly so with his hair having been used as the raw material.

“If you don’t stop being so obnoxiously dense, I’m gonna make you swallow it the next time you open your mouth,” hissed Bakugou, throwing a sideways glare at Todoroki to get him to pipe down once and for all. Luckily for everyone involved, his ‘husband’ did take the hint this time around and went silent. Pleased with that, Bakugou returned his attention to his last task of the day.

At first, Todoroki simply remained where he was, sitting on the sofa next to Bakugou. The TV wasn’t on, so he didn’t have much to do aside from sitting there in total silence. It wasn’t that bad of a thing, as he could be quiet without much issue. And he was still in the

company of Bakugou, which was pretty good in itself. But as was to be expected, at some point, that stopped being enough.

Not wanting to disturb Bakugou too much, Todoroki carefully and very slowly scooched closer to him. Once there was just a slice of air the thickness of a sheet of paper separating them, it was a whole lot easier for Todoroki to take a peek at what his 'husband' was doing. By the looks of it, Bakugou had made quite a lot of progress already and was writing down one of the dishes they had made today. With how detailed but straight-to-the-point the written recipe was, Todoroki truly would have no excuse to say he didn't remember or understand something if quizzed on it.

"I didn't think I'd be studying out of a notebook at my age…" mumbled Todoroki under his breath, the comment aimed more towards himself than Bakugou. He had been under the impression that his studious days had been over the moment he had graduated from U.A., and although, yes, one's learning never truly ended no matter how old they got, that usually didn't revolve around resorting to this type of 'study material'. Not that Todoroki could complain much, as this was the best way to make sure he learned all the skills he needed to 'defeat' his father and their old-fashioned family traditions once and for all.

"You only have your brain and lack of skills to blame," Bakugou chimed in with his neutral tone, far too focused on his task to sound annoyed. "Just make sure you actually use it to kick your father to the curb by the time our mission is over. Otherwise, you owe me all the time I wasted teaching you this stuff."

"I'm not entirely sure how I'd be able to repay a time debt, but I'll be working hard to make sure it never gets down to that," Todoroki deadpanned while offering a very expressionless but still undaunted nod of his head. "Thanks for going out of your way to make things as easy on me as possible, though. Having that notebook will be very helpful."

“Like I said, I’m not doing this for you. It’s for the sake of my freakin’ sanity,” scoffed Bakugou with a light shrug. “Anything goes if it keeps your dumb questions to a bare minimum.”

“I’m a fast learner. I don’t think I’m going to ask you that many questions,” pointed out Todoroki, briefly reading the section Bakugou had just finished writing. Everything in it was things he still remembered having heard during the actual ‘cooking lesson’. “I was a student at the top of our class during our entire time at U.A. I don’t understand why you’re being so hard on me now.”

“Force of habit,” admitted Bakugou with yet another dismissive shrug. “The people I end up tutoring are always total morons who get on my nerves with their dumb questions and annoying inability to memorise simple concepts. Yeah, sure, you’re smart and all that. But I’m also very familiar with how much of a clumsy fuck you can be. And that’s the kind of personality trait that no amount of cramming can fully fix, no matter how old you might get.”

“I don’t know about that. I feel like I’ve really improved on that over the past couple of years,” said Todoroki as he stared down at both of his hands. “I still struggle with controlling my strength and the output of my Quirk, but I haven’t accidentally injured or ‘crushed’ anyone in quite a while.”

“Have you already forgotten who had to carry me around your apartment for the rest of the day because I couldn’t freakin’ walk!?” hissed Bakugou, the fact he even had to say that out loud rubbing him the wrong way.

“This and that are two different things,” deadpanned Todoroki, despite being very confident in his claims. “Besides, that wasn’t 100% on me. You also share some of the blame for what happened.”

“Alright, it’s time we settle this once and for all,” announced Bakugou as he slammed the notebook shut between both of his hands. He once again dropped the notebook and pen on top of the table and turned his body slightly around to better face Todoroki. Bakugou already looked quite cranky as he did so, but his pouty demeanour became even more accentuated with the way he crossed his arms over his chest. “How exactly is *your* lack of self-control *my* fault?”

“Directly speaking, it isn’t your fault per se, as I’m fully responsible for my own actions,” said Todoroki, answering Bakugou’s question with the same degree of seriousness and openness that was being sent his way. “However, you have to admit that you’re really good at seducing me, for some reason. And before you try to throw my previous words back at me, no, it’s not because I’m ‘easy’. I’m not usually all that interested in this sort of stuff, but you never fail to get me in the mood whenever we’re at it. So, indirectly speaking, I’d say you are at least 50% at fault here.”

“50%!? Are you out of your god damned mind!?” yelped Bakugou, extremely scandalised at the ridiculously high number that Todoroki had just spat out. As far as he was concerned, even 10% would be too high, but half of the entire blame? Oh, he was so ready to throw some verbal hands now. “For starters, it’s not my fault you’re a closeted pervert who gets turned on by… I don’t even know what! Second, yeah, you’re responsible for your own actions, so, again, how are your reactions to anything I might or might not do my fault? Last but definitely not least, I keep telling you I haven’t even once tried to seduce you! Why the heck would I even do that to begin with!?”

“I don’t know why you would or wouldn’t do something, but it’s a fact that you have been seducing me,” claimed Todoroki, already fully prepared to defend his position on this issue with several arguments of his own. “You were the one who kissed me first, and opened the possibility of continuing to do so to further our mission. Then, the more we kissed, the more on board with it you became. While still being the same fussy tsundere of always, if I may add.”

“…Call me a tsundere again, and I’ll shove an entire bottle of tabasco

sauce down your piehole while you're sleeping…" grumbled Bakugou, his dissatisfaction clear on his even poutier face, oblivious to the fact that was precisely the type of thing a tsundere would say and do.

"Then there's also your own reactions," continued Todoroki, choosing to ignore his 'husband's' threat in favour of counting up to three with his fingers. "Are you even aware of what you look like whenever we kiss? You also get super into it super fast and keep telling me to 'not stop' and 'keep going'. If that doesn't count as seducing me, I don't know what else would."

"Uhh… It's not like I can control how I subconsciously react to stuff that feels good…" mumbled Bakugou, this time in a more tame and shy fashion.

"And yet you're demanding that I do," pointed out Todoroki with an expressionless 'See?' written all over his face. He very much wanted to go over the fact that Bakugou had literally just admitted that he was exactly on the same boat as he was in terms of self-control and subconscious reactions, but, again, that didn't seem like it would be very beneficial for his side of the conversation, if only because it would incite his 'husband' into becoming even more stubborn and antagonistic.

"That's besides the point! It does not change the fact that I have never seduced you or even thought about seducing you!" said Bakugou in hopes of regaining the upper hand. "Even if what I do or how I react gets you all hot and bothered for some idiotic reason, that's still a you problem! Your Quirk is half ice, ya know? Use it to cool down a notch or two whenever I rub you the… well, right way, I guess. Actually, can't you just stop acting like a teenager in the prime of his sexual awakening? We're too old and busy for that, so I'd appreciate it if you could postpone that awakening until *after* our mission is concluded."

"Like you're one to speak," deadpanned Todoroki, even though he was actually feeling quite sulky for being chastised like this for something

that was fully out of his control. “If it bothers you that much, why don’t you follow through with your usual threats and explode with me on the spot instead of begging me to keep going? Or are you so weak to pleasure that you instantly forget that’s what you always go on and on about whenever you’re complaining about it? If that’s the case, I think you’re the one with a big ‘you problem’ on your hands.”

“That wouldn’t be an issue to begin with if you weren’t always so quick at trying to get in my pants,” scoffed Bakugou, his brows getting even more frowny and rugged at the mention of the word ‘weak’. However, he wasn’t going to give Todoroki the pleasure of seeing him losing it over something like that when he knew he wasn’t the one at fault.

“So you’re admitting you just go along with it whenever someone tries to get in your pants?” asked Todoroki, his sulking only getting worse after voicing out the thought that had immediately popped up in his mind.

“I go along with it whenever *you* try to get in my pants! There’s a difference!” hissed Bakugou, his anger and annoyance making him completely blind and deaf to the very bold admission he was unconsciously making at the moment. Surprisingly, Todoroki was the only person in the room who actually interpreted that the correct way - even if in his own dense way, of course.

“Oh. Got it,” said Todoroki while inwardly breathing out a sigh of relief. Just like that, he was once again feeling all better and a whole lot less sulky and miffed. How curious that that always ended up happening whenever he was talking about this topic with Bakugou… “What’s the issue then? The way you’re putting it makes it sound like you don’t actually mind me wanting to get in your pants all the time. So wouldn’t it be fair to say that half of the blame for us having sex and whatever might happen afterwards is on you too? That’s how consent works, right? 50% is on me, 50% is on you.”

“That’s…! Not… how…… Grrrr…” Stuck with his inability to scream ‘that’s not how any of that works’, Bakugou’s voice ended up fading into a vexed low growl. After a couple of seconds of that, he turned his head away and grumbled, “My position on never having seduced you in any shape or form still stands…”

“Let’s agree on disagreeing on that, then,” chuckled Todoroki, also feeling that this was a nice spot to end their bickering.

“Fuck no! There’s no agreeing on disagreeing when my body is literally and figuratively on the line here, yeah!?” retorted Bakugou, his vicious, glaring crimson eyes readily pinpointing his ‘husband’ once again. “Admit that you’re a degenerate without a drop of self-control and that I’m the poor victim of your degeneracy just because we somehow ended up married!”

“Why are you so insistent on arguing about this when we’ve pretty much come to a consensus about everything else already?” sighed Todoroki, wholeheartedly confused as to why Bakugou was being so pigheaded on this particular aspect of their so-called ‘marital life’. “We both agree we like it, we both agree it’s fine since we’re married, and we both also agree it’s an inevitability at this point. Can’t we just leave things at that and see how it goes from here on out?”

“I’m not a halfass like you, okay? It’s also a matter of principle!” Bakugou said, accusingly stabbing his finger on Todoroki’s chest during the halfass remark. “I cannot stand to be accused of something I’m not doing. It would be a different story if I was and got caught red-handed doing it despite claiming I wasn’t, but since I’m doing jack shit, I will not tolerate being told I am!”

“It all boils down to perception,” sighed Todoroki yet again, not quite sure how exactly he was even supposed to explain something to Bakugou when he didn’t fully understand it himself. “You can’t see yourself doing it, so in your eyes, it doesn’t look like you’re doing anything. But from my point of view, you are definitely doing

something. And pretty frequently, too. You say I have no self-control, but I've actually been holding back quite a lot. Not that I think you need to change the way you act around me or anything. You're fine the way you are, Bakugou, even if you're constantly seducing me."

"Argh, this is driving me crazy!!!" screeched Bakugou while ruffling his own hair out of uncontrollable frustration. There really was no reasoning with someone as unreasonably dense as Todoroki. Trying to use words on him was as effective as speaking to a brick wall. Dropping the subject here and never speaking of it again also wasn't a good solution, as it wouldn't fix the underlying problem - Todoroki's claims of Bakugou seducing him time and time again. Without any warning, Bakugou got up from the sofa and placed himself right in front of Todoroki, his index finger pointing straight at him. "Fine! I'll bite the bait just this one time!"

Bait…? Todoroki repeated in the back of his mind, his head cocked to the side as he wondered what exactly Bakugou was talking about.

"I'm gonna seduce the hell out of you right now!" Bakugou declared loud and clear, a determined look on his frowning face. That vengeful resolve made him not even think twice about sitting back down, this time right on top of Todoroki's lap. He scooched his body closer to him until both of their chests and lower halves were squeezed together in a very provocative manner, which accentuated the slender but bountiful curvature of his upper body. Bakugou had a particularly wicked smirk on his face as he gleefully purred, "Then you'll finally be forced to admit I haven't been doing anything this whole time and that it was all just in your perverted, horny head."

"Let's take this to the bedroom," was the first thing that came out of Todoroki's mouth the moment he opened it. His words were promptly backed up by him getting up from the sofa and making a beeline to his bedroom with Bakugou in tow. The seduction declaration alone had been so effective that it had instantly crumbled any semblance of hesitation he might have had.

“You’re so damn easy, it’s not even funny…” grumbled Bakugou, getting slightly peeved that he was, yet again, being carried around the apartment by his ‘spouse’. It did help him prove a very good point - that Todoroki was actually the weak one in this regard -, so he was willing to tolerate it this one time and didn’t try to fight him off as they changed locations.

Bakugou had every intention of picking up his ‘seduction’ where it had been left off due to Todoroki’s intervention, but the way he was passionately kissed as soon as he had been carefully lowered to the bed sort of got in the way of that. No, not sort of. It had completely gotten in the way of his plans, if they could even be called such. Todoroki was relentless with it too, leaving him nearly no breathing room between those hungry kisses and getting pinned under him.

“Haa… Hey, stop getting in my way and let me seduce you, damn it…” grumbled Bakugou with a pouty tone once he finally had a small reprieve from those deliciously long kisses. In their stead, Todoroki picked his neck as his next target, because of course he did.

“Hm? Haven’t you already accomplished that, though?” pointed out Todoroki as he busied himself with licking and nibbling on Bakugou’s neck and getting the undressing stage started.

“That’s seriously all it took to seduce you!?” hissed Bakugou, part of him absolutely flabbergasted that a handful of seconds of upfront seduction had been enough to bring Todoroki down to his knees. He had pretty much only stated his intention and did very little to follow through with it, and yet his ‘husband’ was already acting like this. The other part of him wanted to slap some sense into Todoroki, because how dare this man accuse him of being easy and weak to pleasure and even worry about his safety when he was ten times worse than him!?

“Like I keep saying, you’re really good at seducing me, Bakugou,” said Todoroki, adjusting his position somewhat so he could sit up and more easily pull and remove Bakugou’s t-shirt. “I wonder if it’s because

you're naturally good at everything you do, or if it's because our chemistry when it comes to sex is that good?"

"As if I'd know! You think I go around seducing other people left and right to see how that plays out?" scoffed Bakugou, getting that out of the way before he went back to complaining about the most important thing right now. But before he could proceed, Todoroki fully yanked his t-shirt up and over his head to remove it. He was forced to very awkwardly contort his torso and arms to not get accidentally suffocated by his own clothes. "Argh, don't just…! Can you slow down a bit? Also, I'm still not done proving my point!"

"Let's save that for another time," requested Todoroki, throwing Bakugou's t-shirt aside before he started undressing his own. As he did so, his eyes remained stuck on his 'husband's' chest and the dozen or so very conspicuous marks currently adorning his pale skin. Todoroki had sort of gotten used to the sight of the few hickeys and bite marks he had left on Bakugou's neck, but it was an entirely different story when it came to his chest, which was usually hidden underneath his clothes. They honestly made Bakugou's soft pecs - and especially his perky nipples - look even more appetising.

"What even makes you think I'm ever giving you another chance at- Ahh!" Bakugou's hissy fit got interrupted when the prowling beast on top of him made a decisive move against his chest and bit him hard in his still-tender nipple, eliciting a very flustering reaction out of his vocal cords and body alike. Bakugou's blush got twice as bright red when Todoroki threw a pleased glance at his face, seemingly satisfied with his reaction. To prevent him from seeing more than he felt comfortable with, Bakugou slapped his hand over Todoroki's face, covering his eyes with it. He also used his thumb to push Todoroki's teeth away from his chest, though that just got him nibbling on his finger next. "...You just never learn, do you?"

"It's payback for earlier," Todoroki chuckled after letting go of Bakugou's thumb. With how pouty that retort left Bakugou, how could he say no to partaking in a few more sweet kisses to his sulky lips? He had been abstaining from doing so ever since Bakugou got pissed off

at Kaminari's loose mouth, but those earlier kisses had fully reignited his desire for more and more and more. One kiss turned into another and then another right afterwards, leaving them both pleasantly breathless the whole time. And in those moments when they weren't losing breath over more kisses, Todoroki was still getting his stolen away by how erotic Bakugou looked.

How exactly was this not Bakugou seducing him? Todoroki was very familiar with how his 'spouse' was in his day-to-day life. He was a menace of a man who had already made one too many young children cry just by frowning a little bit in their vicinity. No one in their right mind would normally look at Bakugou and his gremlin energy and go, yeah, that's the sexiest thing I've ever laid my eyes on. And yet, here was Todoroki ready to throw caution to the wind after just a bit of smooching, all because Bakugou was pure eroticism out of the blue. He might not have been doing it on purpose or even consciously, but it was undeniable that it worked, and it worked especially well on Todoroki.

As their kisses went up in intensity and length, so did the rising temperature of their bodies. Todoroki could feel it so well, even with the body-heat regulation feature his Quirk naturally came with. The stifling warmth he could sense the most was, obviously, Bakugou's, but that was more because he simply couldn't keep his hands to himself rather than an accentuated difference in temperature. It was such a decadent experience to caress him all over and feel all the minute ways his body moved and fidgeted against his touch. Running his hand against the side of his torso could get Bakugou to arch his back in tandem with its downward motion, just as much as teasing his chest did. Both rubbing his earlobe against his fingers and some light grinding with their lower halves caused the exact same type of afflicted squirming. It was these types of little details that never failed to turn Todoroki on, regardless of time or place - though that also meant that Todoroki simply didn't have the leeway to play it cool for very long, doubly so after holding himself back for so long.

We should move on to the main event soon, or else I'll be in too much of a rush to take things as slow as we probably should, Todoroki told himself in the back of his mind, perhaps already in a bit of a hurry to get to

the good part. While the foreplay was definitely here to stay, the warm-up had long gotten their horny engines running at full throttle. Why keep things so tame when they were already so well acquainted with the usual protocol, right? Hence, Todoroki reached out to his nightstand, intending to get the 'wedding gifts' they had been so conveniently offered days prior. But before his hand could get anywhere close to them, his wrist was captured. "Hm?"

"You've finally shown a convenient opening," snorted Bakugou, a smirk already present on his lips as he used his hold on Todoroki's arm and, soon after, shoulder to easily roll them over and reverse their positions on the bed. He victoriously sat on top of Todoroki's waist anew, having gotten them back to how things had first started.

"Now you're the one getting in the way…" deadpanned Todoroki, unable to get to their prized bedroom activity aids from that position and distance. When Bakugou let go of his wrist, he used both of his arms and elbows to sit up a bit more.

"Hah! Karma's a bitch, isn't it?" snickered Bakugou, taking great enjoyment in Todoroki's half-deadpan, half-pouty expression. To taunt him just a tiny little bit more, he leaned his upper body closer to Todoroki as he added, "You should have just let me do things my way right from the start. We'd be way ahead of schedule if you hadn't gone all horny on main for the millionth time."

"Which is why I said we should save that for another time," Todoroki pointed out while inwardly sighing at his 'husband's' attempt at ruffling his feathers. It wasn't that he didn't want to be 'seduced' by Bakugou because, in all honesty, that sounded like a lot of fun. But he had long reached the limit of how much he could hold back. All the physical contact, kissing, flirting and playful teasing they had been up to since the previous day had acted like a slow poison, seeping into every nook and cranny of his body until it swallowed him whole. All Todoroki wanted at the moment was to have full rein over where and how much he could touch Bakugou. However, as usual, his selfish, fussy 'husband' didn't seem too keen on letting him do as he pleased.

“Don’t wanna,” said Bakugou, his smirk growing tenfold as it entered wickedly sadistic territory. “I always finish what I start, no matter how annoying that might be to others.”

“I don’t think ‘annoyed’ is the right word to describe how I’m feeling right now,” Todoroki deadpanned with yet another inward sigh. There really was no use arguing with Bakugou whenever he was in a competitive, contrarian mood. Todoroki might as well let him have his fun for a while as he bided his time for the right moment to step in and pounce him again. He fully sat up straight on the bed and placed his left hand on Bakugou’s hip, his fingers gingerly going inside the waistband of his clothes and sinking into his soft rear.

As the mischievous gremlin that he was, Bakugou just smirked at that remark and motioned his own hand to his pants, slowly pulling them down to his knees. He could have also pulled his underwear at the same time, but well, where was the fun in that? The goal was to seduce Todoroki, right? Taking one piece of clothing at a time sounded a whole lot more seductive to him, so that’s what he planned on doing… until Todoroki grabbed the elastic band of his underwear and pulled it down himself. “Hey!”

“You were being too slow,” said Todoroki, providing some additional support to Bakugou’s body as he urged him to lift his legs from the bed one at a time to finish taking his pants and underwear off. Bakugou did cooperate with that, though not without some miffed grumbles throughout the whole process. Once that was taken care of, his hands promptly returned to their antics, softly caressing Bakugou’s muscled thighs.

“If you’re that insistent on doing something, at least make yourself useful and get naked too,” ordered Bakugou while shooing away Todoroki’s hands from his upper legs. He lifted himself just a little bit from his ‘husband’s’ lap while supporting himself slightly more against his shoulders with his arms, giving him the needed space to take off his lower clothes too while keeping a very sensual closeness between

the two of them.

Todoroki didn't need to be told that twice. He got himself rid of the tightness of his pants and underwear in seconds and joined Bakugou in his nakedness. For it, he was granted the first 'gold star' in a long while, coming as a nice and slow kiss that seemingly had no end in sight. Bakugou looked so pleased with himself for it, like he had been successful in tricking Todoroki into doing something he wanted him to do; but deep down, Todoroki was the true winner there, as he was being rewarded twice over.

Once the kissing gained some good momentum, Todoroki was back at his old habits and tightly holding onto Bakugou's sexy body while pulling him closer. The way their hardened members rubbed against each other just by them breathing was like a little preamble of the sweet pleasure that was to come. It was also the kind of indirect teasing that Todoroki couldn't resist for very long in the inflamed state that he was in. He knew it was a bit of a futility at the moment as far as Bakugou was concerned, but he still grabbed both of their dicks with his hand and started stroking them together. The way Bakugou's fingers unconsciously gripped even more closely onto his shoulder and back was a perfect example of the little things that he did that never failed to arouse Todoroki even further.

With how stubborn Bakugou had been acting about 'seducing' him, Todoroki thought he'd complain about his initiative, even if the double handjob felt good for both of them. But surprisingly, his 'spouse' gave him a pass this time around and simply kept going with what he was already doing.

He won't say it out loud, but he really does enjoy all of this, doesn't he? Todoroki chuckled in the back of his mind. The kissing, the physical proximity, the touching; all were things that would have angered Bakugou or straight-out caused the murder of the perpetrator under normal circumstances. But right now, he was partaking in all three of those things by his own volition and having a great time with it. He was of the opinion that Bakugou should just be more honest about his wants right from the start, but he also found his stubborn lack of

sincerity to be extremely adorable whenever he went through insane loopholes only to end up proving Todoroki's point. *Yeah, I think this should have appeased him enough for the time being.*

"Mmmh!?" Bakugou choked out a small yelp when Todoroki suddenly tightly wrapped his free arm around his waist and used it as a means to keep him motionless as he yet again reversed their positions and pushed him down against the mattress. Had his mouth not been occupied by Todoroki's passionate lips and energetic tongue, he would have hissed and cussed at him instantly. Instead, his anger was pacified and melted into nothingness through their kissing. His voice was but a sulky rasp by the time it was over. "...I'm still not done seducing you, damn it…"

"Bakugou, if you try to seduce me any more than you already have, you're going to be in trouble," confessed Todoroki, using the measly leftovers of the self-control he still had around to keep himself from jumping him right there and then. Being this unaware of the effects his risqué appearance and sensual reactions had on others should be considered a crime. If they didn't pick up the pace just a bit more, the likelihood of Bakugou ending up bedridden the following day with a sore back increased exponentially. There was nothing more dangerous than relentlessly provoking and fanning up the flames of someone with a pretty intense sex drive while not providing a proper outlet to safely get all of it out of his system.

"Heh, is that a challenge I'm hearing?" snickered Bakugou, his lips slowly curling into a bewitching smirk. His rosy cheekbones and the softer glint in his unyielding eyes really accentuated how beautiful he could be whenever not frowning and glaring like a demon.

"No, it's a fact," declared Todoroki, not falling for the provocative taunts and instead choosing to finally get the lube and condoms from their safekeeping location by the bed. Now he could afford to take his time slowly but methodically devouring his lewd 'husband' - within reason, of course. He opened the cap of the bottle of lube with one smooth motion and got some of the sticky liquid on his left hand to get it a bit warmer before bringing it straight to Bakugou's pleasantly

tight opening. Todoroki also included a little warning while he was at it. “If you keep teasing me like this, you’re going to spend the next 24 hours or so unable to get out of my bed.”

“I thought it was ‘our’ bed?” pointed out Bakugou, immediately doing the exact opposite of what Todoroki had so kindly warned him not to. The riled-up frown that promptly appeared on his ‘husband’s’ usually expressionless face was like the cherry on top of a very satisfying cake.

“If you’re that eager not to be able to walk once again, you should have just said so,” deadpanned Todoroki, carefully pushing a finger all the way inside his mischievous ‘husband’ in a single motion. Bakugou’s provocative façade diminished a small fraction, but the sheepish squirming that was added to the mixture in its stead was equally as tempting, if not even more. As Todoroki kept moving his finger in and out or adding more, generously coating every nook and cranny of his tight insides with the lube, all of that bravado crumbled apart bit by bit. Was it bad of Todoroki to think that the more Bakugou fidgeted around, his breathing rhythm hitching now and then as his face steadily turned bright red from self-consciousness, the lovelier he looked? Was it the way it contrasted so greatly with his usual menacing demeanour? Or was it the open display of defenselessness despite still trying to hide his embarrassment? Maybe a mixture of both? Whatever it might be, Todoroki was a total slave to it already.

“Ahh! W-Wait…” Bakugou beckoned just as Todoroki added a third finger and thrusted them in as far as they could reach. His body jolted from head to toe with the tantalizing intrusion, first clenching around it before fully welcoming it in. He reflexively motioned his hand towards Todoroki, but he wasn’t entirely sure what exactly he was trying to accomplish with that. Did he want him to pause for a little bit? Did he want something else? Bakugou truly had no idea, aside from the fact that the way Todoroki responded to it was a huge hit in terms of increasing the speed of his heartbeat.

“I’m not waiting,” said Todoroki, grabbing Bakugou’s hand from below to bring it closer to his lips. He then did the exact same

endearment act that the actor had in the movie he had watched earlier that afternoon - he kissed the knuckles of his fingers and then nibbled one of them right after.

"Ngh…" Bakugou's face went so beet red that he had probably instantly evaporated all the droplets of sweat dripping down his steaming skin. It took him a couple of seconds to regain his bearing, but once he did, he shooed away Todoroki's hand and pinched his nose hard enough that he could drag his upper body closer to him. He was still blushing very visibly, but it was slightly more hidden behind the pouty frown he had put on his face. "Stop playing around and hurry it up, then…"

"Sure," acknowledged Todoroki, his voice coming out a bit funny because of the nose pinching. He could interpret that as Bakugou telling him he was ready to go, right? He was easily able to fit three of his fingers in him, tightly as it might be, so it was safe to assume he would be able to lodge himself in there too. The thought of it alone made his cock even harder, which really came in handy to make putting the condom on as easy and quick as possible (though that might also have been all the hands-on experience he had been getting as of late). Todoroki leaned closer to Bakugou as he pressed the head of his cock against the lubbed-up opening, and softly kissed the top of Bakugou's sweaty forehead. "I'm putting it in, yeah?"

"...I can tell. I don't need a play-by-play report…" grumbled Bakugou, circling his arms around Todoroki's neck in preparation for what was to come. He also sealed his blabbering mouth with a deep kiss, just in case his 'husband' was thinking of saying any more unnecessary comments or questions after sticking his dick in him. Of course, that had the additional benefit of muffling Bakugou's moans when Todoroki did thrust his hips forward and officially joined their bodies in a sexual sense. An instantaneous rush of pleasure climbed up his spine and spread to every single cell in his body, leaving Bakugou craving for even more. *Damn it, this really feels stupidly good. The risk of addiction is no joke…*

Despite knowing that, Bakugou didn't have the kind of mental

fortitude that allowed him to say no to Todoroki from here onwards. He could bitch and complain about it all day long, but when push comes to shove, the answer that always came out of his mouth was an indirect yes. Because of that, he was banking on finishing their unofficial mission before he inadvertently did irreparable 'damage' to his own physical and sexual needs a second time, and got hooked on something he definitely would not be able to get a fix of on his lonesome.

Then again, I can see this doofus saying something along the lines of 'We already started this, and we're both single, so we might as well keep banging' once we're done with this dumb mission and get divorced…, Bakugou sighed in the back of his mind, bless his emotionally constipated heart. The thought of that very likely possibility made Bakugou scrunch up his face out of the bitter aftertaste it left behind in his mind, which Todoroki erroneously interpreted as him being dissatisfied with something he was doing wrong or badly.

To make up for those faults(?), Todoroki lightly kissed Bakugou's sulky face a couple of times: some were delivered to his rosy cheeks, others to the tip of his nose, at times even right next to his pursed lips. That took the razor-sharp edge off of whatever had annoyed him. Last but not least, Todoroki partook of his soft, sweet lips yet again while also putting his hips to good use. Each time he rubbed his tongue against Bakugou's, he could feel him holding more closely to his back, and whenever he hit a particularly good spot while pounding him, Bakugou promptly squeezed Todoroki's cock with his gooey, slippery hole.

"Sorry, Bakugou, but I really can't hold back anymore," said Todoroki, seemingly out of nowhere. He, however, knew this was simply the consequences of his own flirty actions throughout their 'date' and all of Bakugou's mischievous teasing (plus his unconscious seductive antics, of course). There was just no helping it anymore.

"Huh? Ahhh…!" Before Bakugou could retort to that last-minute warning, Todoroki grabbed the back of his right knee and pulled his leg slightly upwards. That created the perfect angle to more easily and

deeply penetrate him, not to mention doing so a whole lot more hurriedly and roughly. With each passionate thrust, all Bakugou could do was arch his back while moaning with an embarrassingly sultry voice, as he no longer had any kisses keeping it muffled. “Ahh, haa… T-Todoro- Ahh!”

“Ngh…” If Todoroki had made one mistake, it had been to overlook how damn tempting Bakugou’s raspy voice got whenever he was moaning his brains out. It made Todoroki want to get him even louder, especially now that they no longer needed to worry about bothering their neighbours with their bedroom activities. He even knew several different ways he could accomplish that, as he had spent the past week memorizing every single erogenous zone on his ‘husband’s’ body and the effect each one had on him.

Todoroki pushed his dick balls deep inside of Bakugou’s tight entrance while leaning his face closer to him. He captured his soft earlobe with his front teeth, gently nibbling into it before he carefully gave it a little tug.

“Ahhh!” Bakugou’s reaction was instant. A loud moan broke free from his vocal cords as his body trembled all over. The tip of his cock was oozing precum in copious amounts, wetting Todoroki’s ripped abs as they rubbed against each other. His nails clawed desperately at Todoroki’s back, as if that was what kept him from going insane from the overpowering pleasure.

He’s so cute and lewd that I really don’t know what to do with myself, Todoroki admitted to his own buttons as he was assaulted by another wave of intense desire. He kept thrusting as hard as he could while nibbling and suckling on his ear and earlobe, indulging himself both in the sexual gratification down south and the adorable and so very tempting sight of Bakugou melting into a pile of luxurious goo.

There was, however, one little thing that Todoroki’s horny brain could not overlook even amidst its pleasurable haze. He had been thinking

about it quite a lot since earlier that week, after all, trying to figure out the best way to approach the subject without starting a cold war between them. But if he did it right now, while Bakugou was mellowed out by the pleasure, maybe…

“Bakugou, we’re married now, right…?” Todoroki started, whispering those words straight into Bakugou’s sensitive ear. “So shouldn’t we call each other by our first names instead of the family name?”

“Huh…?” gasped Bakugou, not exactly in the best of positions to be receiving questions, doubly so those as silly as that one.

“I mean, you’re technically a Todoroki now too, so isn’t it weird you keep calling me by that name?” pointed out Todoroki before his ‘spouse’ could start his usual angry tirade. “Even my father has said a couple of times that he thinks it’s suspicious how we don’t call each other by our first names. For the sake of our ‘mission’, we should change that from now on.”

“Huh!? This isn’t the right time for- Ahh…!” As per usual, Bakugou began hissing at Todoroki in retaliation for his sorry excuse of bad timing, but got interrupted by an annoyingly well-timed thrust.

“No, I think this is the right time to get that started,” said Todoroki, once again going after Bakugou’s ear, both with his words and sensual ministrations. “As you usually say, Katsuki, practice makes perfect, right?”

“Ngh! Ahh! W-Wai-” Amidst all of that, Bakugou was forced to let go of Todoroki’s back so he could half cover his mouth and face with the back of his hand. Not an easy feat when his body was still being energetically bounced against the mattress, and he was already so sapped of strength. “T-Todo- Ahhh!”

“It’s Shouto,” corrected Todoroki after a stronger nibble to his auricle and a rougher thrust that buried the entire length of his cock deep into him. The lewd moan and the clenching around his dick that that resulted in got him even more decided to get Bakugou to say his name. If his calling out his family name with that raspy voice of his already felt heavenly and so seductive, wouldn’t hearing his first name feel even sweeter and more intimate? Todoroki definitely wanted a piece of that for himself from now on, both in and outside of the bedroom. “You already call me by that name whenever we’re working, so you should be used to it by now.”

“That’s, ahh, d-different…” stammered Bakugou between moans and shallow breathing. But that was very clearly not the kind of answer Todoroki wanted to hear from him right now. Rather than continuing to torture him with how good it felt to be pounced, Todoroki decided to do so with the sudden absence of it, halting his thrusting motions completely while still halfway inside of him. Given that Bakugou was so very close to getting some sweet, sweet release, that was possibly the worst thing he could have done. “Uhh… I-I get it already, so can you stop screwing around and continue screwing *me* instead!?”

“.....” Since the ‘magic word’ hadn’t been uttered yet, Todoroki simply expressionlessly stared right back at his ‘husband’s’ flustered face, patiently waiting for the actual command that would get him moving once again. Watching Bakugou grinding his teeth out of frustration while his face grew steadily redder and poutier was a huge hit with his heart, but Todoroki was certain that it would still pale in comparison to that one thing that he was seeking.

“...I hate you so damn much…” grumbled Bakugou, his crimson gaze falling downwards as he turned his sulking face to the side. “...Hurry up and drop dead so I can inherit all of your crap and burn it in front of your grave… Shouto…”

Oh yes, Todoroki could totally get on board with that. Not with the whole ‘dropping dead’ and getting all of his belongings burnt to ashes

right in front of his grave, but with being called ‘Shouto’ by Bakugou both on and off the clock, both at regular moments and when they were getting down and dirty. It wasn’t done as a moan, but rather as a makeshift cuss, and yet hearing Bakugou call his name still had gotten him and his lower half all fired up.

There hadn’t been any need to think about how he should pick up where they had left off, because Todoroki was already on the move by the time that thought crossed his mind. He also went all out right from the start, the sharp sound of their bodies rhythmically colliding against one another intertwining with the squelching noises of the well-lubricated, tight entrance getting intensely rubbed. Even Bakugou’s erotic mewls of pleasure couldn’t fully drown out the other sensual sounds.

With how turned on both of them were, it was about time Todoroki got truly serious. It wasn’t as if they had anything better to do that night, so he could take his time enjoying the bewitching man he had married and indulging himself in the depravity of the sexual desire he felt towards him. But that didn’t mean he couldn’t give it his best the entire time.

“Katsuki,” Todoroki whispered once again before slowly licking the outer edge of Bakugou’s bright red ear. The way he could physically feel his ‘husband’s’ body tensing for no more than a fraction of a second told him he probably also experienced the same weird but addictive sensation in his core that he did when Bakugou called his name. It made him want to continue saying his name again and again, even if it came across as silly or needy. “Katsuki… Katsuki…”

“Ngh, ah…” Even if Bakugou turned his head away, there was still no escape from Todoroki’s sweet nothings. Could they even be called that when he only kept repeating a single word, to begin with? Well, not that it mattered. Having his own name whispered in such a suggestive way right against his ear time and time again was so embarrassing and made him feel so self-conscious that he just wanted to grab the bedsheet and smother himself with it. He couldn’t even understand how Todoroki could do something like that with a straight face, but…

With a single glance at his handsome face, Bakugou could see that Todoroki's usual expressionlessness couldn't actually be found anywhere in sight, having been replaced by something that he couldn't quite describe with a single adjective and an amalgamation of them. What he did know was that Todoroki was unmistakably horny as fuck and about to give him one hell of a good time. Not even a truth serum or interrogation Quirk would be able to get this information out of him, but the thought of that alone got him equally as aroused.

In that perfect flow of getting turned on by the mere fact of the other being turned on and vice versa, it took no time for Bakugou to reach the end of his endurance. The sex itself was pretty darn good as it was, but all of that physical intimacy really elevated it a step further. He got to reach his climax with a vengeance, the sharp peak in pleasure promptly robbing him of any remaining strength he might still have had in stock. His night could have ended here, and he would have had no complaints about it, but of course Todoroki had different plans in mind.

"Don't rest yet just because you came, Katsuki," said Todoroki, purposefully burying himself balls deep in that tight cocoon of gooey warmth. The loud moan that milked out of Bakugou's quivering vocal cords was like music to his ears. Todoroki let go of his leg and allowed it to fully fall back on the bed, but he quickly replaced that hold by grabbing onto his slender waist with both of his hands.

"Wai- Ahhhh!" Todoroki's hard cock had already been pretty well stabbed inside of him, but once his position was changed from horizontal to vertical and he was made to sit directly on top of him, it definitely got him good in one of his weak spots. He found himself unable to breathe right for a handful of seconds, too overwhelmed by the mind-blowing pleasure and the slightly uncomfortable sensation of being filled to the brim. Once he could breathe properly again, the air in his lungs came out shaky and heavy, but even that, in a roundabout way, was part of what made it feel so freaking good.

Todoroki silently sought Bakugou's okay on the matter, leaning his

face closer to lightly peck him on the lips and nuzzle the tip of their noses together, ever so softly that it came out as ticklish and got a small chuckle out of both of them. Tender scenes like this one didn't undo the spicy passion of their lovemaking, but rather gave it a bit of a contrasting edge. They might be fucking like two savage bunnies, but they still had their moments.

Once Todoroki had ascertained that Bakugou was fine and there were no issues with continuing, his hands drifted downwards and grabbed hold of his 'husband's' feathery soft buttcheeks. Bakugou might have been built out of ripped muscles, hard bones and delicate curves, but Todoroki's arms were still strong enough to singlehandedly lift all of that weight and get him vigorously bouncing up and down on his stiff cock. His 'spouse's' contributions to that position were a sexy body that had been mellowed down into a very relaxed state and such lovely and tempting reactions that Todoroki would literally do anything to prolong this initial round of sex. Because yeah, he too was on the verge of coming, but he'll be damned if that brought a conclusion to their night.

"Ahh! Shouto… Ngh, haa… S-Shouto…!" Bakugou moaned, already starting to get hard a second time even though he had reached his climax a short while ago. But who could blame him, with Todoroki so masterfully going after all of his good spots outside and inside? That stubborn halfassed bastard had definitely been taking some notes on Bakugou's more mischievous and sadistic side, as he refused to get his lips, tongue, and teeth away from his neck and ears despite being aware of how sensitive he was in those areas. It felt frighteningly good now, but Bakugou was certain he'd regret letting him keep at it tomorrow morning once he looked in the mirror… *Well, screw that, I ain't letting him get off scot-free out of this a second time…!*

Just as Todoroki's dick hit a particularly good spot deep inside of him and his insides clenched around it, Bakugou opened his mouth wide and bit him hard on his shoulder, sealing with it the vulgar moan that would have otherwise escaped from his panting lips.

"Ngh…!" Despite the sharp, stinging pain assaulting his shoulder,

Todoroki still succumbed to the sweet squeezing and finally let himself go inside of that tightness. He only noticed he had been holding his breath for a couple of seconds when all the air being stored in his lungs came out in a big sigh. Todoroki then finally let go of Bakugou's juicy ass and motioned one of his hands towards his face instead, cajoling Bakugou into letting go of his shoulder by rubbing the pad of his finger against his pursed lips. With how hard he had been bitten, of course Bakugou's mouth was lightly smudged with red once again. Todoroki lightly wiped his blood from his lips with his thumb, all while taking in the sight of his 'husband's' blushing face and his soft but strong-willed crimson eyes. He had to swallow the aroused solid lump in his throat as he said with a husky voice, "You always end up biting me way too hard…"

Bakugou could have easily come up with a million different comebacks to that remark, but what felt right to him at the moment was to playfully nibble Todoroki's thumb with a bewitching smirk on his blood-stained lips. The agitated scowl that ever so lightly skewed Todoroki's brows was absolutely divine to watch.

Todoroki, too, found that seductive invitation to be flawless. He brought Bakugou's face closer while his thumb was still pressed against his moist tongue, but quickly replaced it with his own as he initiated another biting kiss. As they hungrily devoured each other's lips, Todoroki's hands busied themselves caressing Bakugou's thighs. With them glued to one another, he could feel his 'spouse's' still-erect dick rubbing against his lower abdomen whenever one of them so much as breathed. Unfortunately, they hadn't been as well-timed as their previous encounters, so they ended up in the worst-case scenario of one being at full mast and the other, well, not as much - and the one pitching that tent just had to be the one whose whole sexual shtick was his inability to come without some backdoor stimulation.

No matter how turned on Todoroki might still be, there was no way to pop up a boner on command just like that. He would have to come up with some improvisation until he was up and ready to dick him down one more time.

Carefully, Todoroki adjusted the position of Bakugou's legs and then proceeded to lay him back down on the bed, using this as his cue to also unmount him and get rid of that used condom. His lips never parted ways with Bakugou's as he did all of that, however. Todoroki kept kissing him with wanton abandon, like he'd die if he went without it for even a couple of seconds. Then, he moved downwards towards his neck, licking its entire length until he lightly scratched his teeth against Bakugou's Adam's apple. Todoroki sucked hard on that portion of his pale neck, adding one more bright red hickey to the collection, much to Bakugou's begrudging annoyance.

"Nngh…" Bakugou's body trembled all over as Todoroki then moved down to his chest, taking hold of one of his nipples with his mouth. A single little nip in that spot got him arching his back and pressing down the back of his hand against his mouth to keep his voice in check. Due to their track record to date, Bakugou thought that Todoroki was about to begin the usual 'humiliation ritual' that involved all sorts of sexual acts being performed on his chest and, specifically, his nipples. But surprisingly, Todoroki quickly parted ways with both and moved downwards again, tracing the entire path to his navel with his slippery tongue. Whether it was because of his own lack of experience or because he didn't have the leeway to properly think things through at the moment, Bakugou only connected the dots in full when it was already too late, and Todoroki's voracious mouth was engulfing his dick. "Ahh…! Haa, ngh…!"

Now, this was the first time Todoroki was doing something like this, so he wasn't entirely sure of how he should go about it. But if he were to base himself on Bakugou's breathtaking reactions and the lack of complaints so far, he couldn't have been doing too poorly with this blowjob. Todoroki made sure to be extra careful with his clumsiness and kept his teeth far away from the fragile male organ as he ran his tongue along the shaft and lapped up the small droplets of precum leaking out.

"Ah, ngh… Haa, S-Sho…to…" gasped Bakugou, tightly closing his eyes at the striking rush coursing through his spine. His hand unconsciously grabbed the top of Todoroki's head, his curling fingers getting tangled up in his white and red strands of hair. That somehow

ended up serving as the impetus for Todoroki to swallow his dick even further and suckle harder on its head. Bakugou moaned in rapture, his body jolting from head to toe. “Ahhh! Shouto…! Haa… S-Shouto…!”

How dangerous, Todoroki thought in the back of his mind, peeking upwards at the little he could see of Bakugou’s lewd facial expression. It was a miracle he hadn’t reverted to his habit of clenching his jaw at the sound of his ‘husband’s’ lustful moans, especially with him now so openly calling out his name. Thanks to that, he was also ready to return to poundtown, his cock having gotten rock hard at that seductive mating call. He did want to get Bakugou off with the blowjob, though, so he kept going at it with the additional help of a sleek finger crawling up inside his twitching hole.

“Haah…! W-Wai- Not at the same- Ahhh…!” stammered Bakugou, unable to finish his sentence thanks to Todoroki thrusting his finger all the way inside him. That was more than his sensitive body could handle simultaneously, tremendously aroused as he was. “Shou- Haa, ahhh!”

“Oh.” As Bakugou was hit by the intensity of his orgasm, he unconsciously flexed his arm and, with it, pulled at Todoroki’s hair. That yank dragged his mouth away from his cock as his cum spurted out, partially hitting the side of his face and chin. Todoroki calmly wiped off the sticky release with the back of his hand while sitting up straight, his heterochromatic eyes taking in the decadent sight of his gasping ‘husband’ anew. “That sure was quick.”

“Haa, haa…” Bakugou said nothing at that, too preoccupied with wheezing and enjoying the afterglow of his climax. His mind felt so hazy and slow after coming two times, and yet he was still weirdly hyperaware of his surroundings and, especially, Todoroki. Bakugou couldn’t help but follow him with his gaze as he went to grab a second condom and ripped it open with his teeth. He slowly, hungrily licked his lips at the part where Todoroki put that thin layer of latex around that destructive force of nature of his.

Yeah, I'm/he's not walking tomorrow, they both thought simultaneously, fully aware this had only been the opening act of a long night of lust and self-indulgence.

Chapter 57

Yup, mistakes were definitely made… Bakugou groaned first thing in the morning, his brain still very much groggy from having just woken up. His well-intuned internal clock made him wake up at the usual early hour in the morning, but he still felt as tired as if he had only gotten a handful of hours of sleep - probably because he indeed had only slept for a short while. Most of his usual hours of sleep had been eaten up by their voracious sex drive, and, as such, he was left with scraps for his actual rest.

He was still on vacation, and they didn't have any concrete plans for this Friday, so, ultimately, Bakugou decided to turn around, cover himself better with the bedsheets, and go back to sleep. He could have used a bath before returning to dreamland, but he wasn't about to humiliate himself further with another fall to the floor first thing in the morning. Todoroki might have still been fast asleep next to him, getting some peaceful shut-eye after yet again wrecking his 'husband's' ability to walk straight; however, that did not mean Bakugou would risk tempting fate and have him wake up at the worst moment possible.

I'll just sleep this off for a few more hours and then beat the snot out of him…, Bakugou decided in the back of his mind, tightly closing his eyes and forcing himself back into shutting off his brain.

With this being the first time he used Todoroki's new bed, it took him a while to find that sweet spot and position that enabled him to drift right back to sleep. But after scooching this way and moving around that way, he eventually landed in the optimal sleeping arrangement. Surely the fact that there was a big empty space between him and the edge of the bed, but nearly not as much between him and Todoroki was just a coincidence. Every mattress had its quirks and kinks, and that location smack dab in the middle just so happened to be the prime spot as far as Bakugou was concerned.

Just like that, Bakugou smoothly fell asleep a second time and was out cold for the next few hours.

That made it so Todoroki was the second person to wake up that morning, but the only one currently awake in the room.

Nn… I'm surprised Katsuki is still sleeping…, slowly mumbled Todoroki to his own buttons, the sight of his 'husband's' spiky blonde hair having been the first thing to greet his heterochromatic eyes that morning. Usually, by the time Todoroki woke up, Bakugou would have already been doing something, be it cooking breakfast or getting his daily dose of exercise. *Hm… Maybe we overdid it a bit last night… I wasn't being serious when I said I'd get him stuck to my bed for the next 24 hours…*

Then again, when exactly had they *not* overdone it when having sex? All the previous times had left them either sleep-deprived or somewhat sore, with Bakugou taking most of the brunt of it when it came to his ability to move properly. And last night had been particularly wild, thanks to Todoroki's inability to hold back after being so masterfully seduced by Bakugou. Had they gone a bit too crazy? Yes, most certainly they had. Did either of them see that as a problem, back then or right now? Well, Todoroki couldn't speak for Bakugou, but he definitely did not.

So I say, but this will definitely become a problem if we keep it up after our time off from work ends…, sighed Todoroki, already foreseeing some incoming issues and roadblocks in his sex life. He was experiencing what getting it on with Bakugou while free of any responsibilities was like, but their vacation period wasn't a good measuring tool for what things will be like once they returned to work. Their crazy sex sprees probably will come to an end by the start of next week, and they most likely will not return in the foreseeable future, if ever.

To begin with, it was just too big a risk in general. Putting aside the fact that being lost in their own lust for hours on end could make

them unable to readily act in an emergency or a last-minute dispatch, there was also a slight chance the 'side effects' could interfere with their duties. In the pro hero trade, even a one-second delay could have deadly repercussions, both for themselves and those around them. For the sake of everyone's safety, they needed to be in tip-top shape at all times. Going at it like rabbits high on aphrodisiacs just wasn't very sensible any way Todoroki looked at it…

Of course, that didn't mean they needed to ban sex and go fully abstinent for the rest of their lives. That was too big an ask to make, if not downright idiotic and impossible. They just needed to tone it down a bit… and by that, it meant *Todoroki* had to tone it down a whole lot.

Hmm… What to do… I can't say no to Katsuki whenever he gets all lewd and seductive, but I also can't use that as an excuse forever… Todoroki wondered in the back of his mind, turning his body slightly around so he could better face Bakugou. He had his back turned at him, which meant all he could see was the back of his spiky blonde head, but for some reason, even that tugged at his heartstrings. Todoroki's brain had zero say on how his body readily scooched closer to him and carefully wrapped his arms around his sleeping 'husband'. He then nestled his chin on the top of his head and let out a satisfied sigh. *Well, I'll think about that once the time comes. Maybe we'll be able to reach some sort of agreement or schedule for this too, just like we have been doing for every other facet of our fake married life.*

Was that conclusion extremely half-assed? Definitely. Bakugou would have chided him relentlessly for it had they been discussing this matter in person already. But what else was Todoroki supposed to do? He had such an adorably cozy sight right before his eyes; he had no time to be going into complicated discussions with himself when he could instead be partaking in that coziness too.

Being in a marriage of convenience with Bakugou truly was the best - or so Todoroki found it to be. He was saving a whole lot more money by splitting rent and all other bills with his 'spouse', while also upgrading his living environment to such a luxurious apartment

complex. The food was Michelin-restaurant-grade every single day, and he was even taking ‘cooking lessons’ for free straight from his genius chef of a ‘husband’. He also always had the time of his life when together with his ‘spouse’, whether they were taking it slow at home or going out on fake dates to publicly display their good ‘relationship’. And, of course, the sex was out of this world. What’s there not to like?

Some would have definitely said Bakugou itself was the big elephant in the room as an answer to that sort of question. He was extremely fussy and strict regarding a huge laundry list of things. He had nearly no tolerance for mistakes or unnecessary stuff. He was also frighteningly fast at resorting to violence and torturous punishments when wronged in some perceived way. Overall, Bakugou Katsuki was a very *particular* human specimen, to put it kindly.

But to Todoroki, all of that was a nothingburger. He had no problem with Bakugou being the way he was, even if his personality and behaviour were a tad bit hard to navigate at times. Even when they were at the dorm or attending the supplementary classes for the provisional hero license, Todoroki hadn’t struggled too badly at getting along nicely with him. And now that it was just the two of them living together and the usual sources of trouble (read: certain members of their former high school class) weren’t around, he felt those minute issues they had had in the past were mostly sorted out. Todoroki was confident that he would be able to peacefully enjoy his fake married life with Bakugou to its fullest under this set of circumstances.

Well, sort of.

“Hey… I’m not a fuckin’ body pillow…” Suddenly, a very menacing voice came from right below Todoroki’s head. It was soon followed by a sharp, painful pinch to one of the arms he had wrapped around Bakugou’s slender frame. “If you don’t wanna die, you have three seconds to let go of me. And it’s already counting!”

“Oh.” And there went Todoroki’s cozy time down the drain… Not wanting to start their day on the wrong foot, he slowly loosened his hold on his naked body and eventually let go altogether. The absence of hugging something so warm and soft was felt instantly, leaving Todoroki with the feeling that he had just missed out on something. He made sure to take a mental note of that, so he could later on try to figure out what that something was.

“Seriously… It’s hot and humid as fuck already, and yet you’re still being so clingy first thing in the morning…” grumbled Bakugou while turning his body around to lie down on his back. “At least put that stupid Quirk of yours to good use while you’re doing that crap or something…”

“I definitely will next time,” said Todoroki, nodding his head a couple of times with a very deadpan expression. So that had been Bakugou’s problem with the cuddling? Had he known that in advance, Todoroki would have made sure they were both pleasantly cool right from the start. Meanwhile, he sat up on the bed and went to grab the AC’s remote control from the nightstand to fix the temperature situation inside his bedroom. “Better?”

“Nn…” It was a pretty subdued answer coming from someone like Bakugou, but it was as much as he could muster while cooling off. Once he was refreshed enough to actually move without being assaulted by a wave of annoyance at the insufferable temperature, he also sat up and lightly stretched his arms above his head. “Ugh, I need a bath so bad…”

“I’m on it,” acknowledged Todoroki without missing a beat. He was like a homing missile as he jumped out of the bed and made a beeline straight to his bathroom, not even minding the fact that he too was stark naked. There was just no way he’d pass on the opportunity to enjoy another long soak in the bathtub with his ‘husband’! Todoroki started the tub's automatic fill-in feature and returned to the bedroom to grab some towels.

“I never said I was going to take a bath here, let alone with you,” Bakugou pointed out while rolling his eyes at Todoroki’s eager initiative. The fact he had grabbed two sets of towels rather than just one made it pretty darn obvious that he wasn’t going to let Bakugou use his bathroom while he made himself scarce somewhere else. However, of course his very on-point remark was swiftly ignored, and Todoroki proceeded to pick him up from the bed like that was just the natural order of things. “HEY! Don’t pretend you didn’t hear me just now! And don’t pick me up without my permission either!!!”

“Even if I did ask for your permission, you wouldn’t give it to me,” deadpanned Todoroki, being forced to somewhat adjust his hold to Bakugou’s wiggling, thrashing body. A barked ‘Exactly!’ was promptly screamed at him with a very sulking, begrudging tone. With the way things were going, he would be in for a very non-relaxing time in the bathtub with Bakugou - one that could potentially put his life at risk. Todoroki had to defuse this ticking time bomb somehow before it blew up on his face. “Can you even walk right now?”

“.....I won’t know until I try……” mumbled Bakugou under his breath, suddenly halting all movements. With the current soreness on his lower back and the sluggishness he felt from the waist down, the likelihood of his walking capabilities having been temporarily disabled was a value so high that he did not even want to think about it… But there was no way in hell Bakugou would ever say any of that out loud, much less to the person who had caused it in the first place!

“So in other words, no, you cannot walk right now,” said Todoroki, translating that grumbling into non-tsundere vernacular while nodding his head in acknowledgement. It would have been a whole lot more straightforward had Bakugou simply admitted to it rather than fight him on it, but what else could he have expected out of his stubborn, prideful ‘husband’?

“I said I won’t know until I try!” hissed Bakugou, extremely offended at the supposition being made… even if it was most likely correct. “Stop putting such crappy words in my mouth!”

“Sorry,” sighed Todoroki very insincerely, trying to distract Bakugou for long enough to get the two of them safely locked up inside his bathroom. Thanks to their usual bickering antics, that plan was a success, and Todoroki completed his transportation mission without getting his ass whooped. “Well, since we’re already here and the bathtub is almost ready, we might as well use it together. Think of all the water and time we’ll be saving like this.”

“Water and time might be saved, but your life definitely will not once our mission is over…” grumbled Bakugou very begrudgingly as he was carefully lowered and sat down on the edge of the bathtub. It was better than being dropped on the floor, but he also didn’t appreciate being treated with kid gloves. It wasn’t as if he was on his deathbed or anything. Plus, they might have been slightly weakened, but he could still move his legs just fine. He decided to show Todoroki exactly that by kicking him in the back of the leg the moment he turned around to place the towels in the bathroom's dry area.

He’s so childishly petty…, Todoroki deadpanned inwardly, peering over his shoulder after that small kick only to see his ‘husband’ sticking his tongue out at him while giving him the middle finger. If this were anyone else, he wouldn’t tolerate the disrespect he was receiving when all he was trying to do was be nice and helpful, but with Bakugou… *It’s insane how cute he still is even while acting like a total menace. I wonder if that’s why everyone just takes it in stride instead of hating and isolating him. Then again, I don’t remember anyone ever commenting about how cute Katsuki is, just that he’s a gremlin or a violent tsundere or a relentless terrorist who enjoys bullying and tormenting other people… Could it be that the ‘cute’ descriptive really is just a me thing?*

Todoroki was still deep in thought about that sudden realisation when he walked back to the bathing area of his bathroom. He hadn’t spent all that much time putting the towels elsewhere, but Bakugou had already busied himself with moving his sitting location from the bathtub to the low stool by the showerhead and was getting ready to get his bath started.

“Do you…?” Todoroki intended to ask Bakugou if he needed help with anything else, be it with the bathing itself or by grabbing him a fresh set of clothes from his bedroom. But a single sideways glare in his direction made Todoroki zip up his lips. The bickering argument that would result from that question just wasn’t worth it. Todoroki sighed in the back of his mind. *I’ll just lend him some of my clothes until he’s well enough to walk up to his own room, I guess.*

Seemingly satisfied with his abrupt silence, Bakugou turned on the showerhead and doused himself with the water, even though it came out cold at first. It was hot and humid enough for a lower water temperature to feel as nice as a piping hot shower, and Bakugou wasn’t one to mind whichever way it happened so long as he could be practical with his time. Soaking in the bathtub was a different story, though, as the purpose of that was to help restore and heal his sore, tired body. But that was for after he was done getting his sweaty, sticky body squeaky clean once again.

While Todoroki waited for Bakugou to be done getting his body and hair all wet and soapy, he crouched down next to the spot where he was sitting. His bathroom only had one set of everything, as it was supposedly only for one person in their current living arrangement. He had no choice but to patiently wait for his turn.

As luck would have it, though, the waiting itself wasn’t all that bad. He could take his time observing his ‘spouse’ and giving him a quick physical assessment. It wasn’t as if Bakugou would answer his questions truthfully, so he had to figure it out on his own through a visual check-up. And from what he could see, he wasn’t doing too poorly, overall. Bakugou was still being as fussy and energetic with his hissy fits as usual and resorting to hitting other people when irked by them. He was also moving about without much struggle or pained complaints. Aside from some bruised hickeys and light bite marks here and there, Bakugou’s body also looked pristine. Actually, he was probably the one worse off in that regard.

Todoroki might be able to walk without any issues, and his waist was only ever so slightly sore from all the intense humping, but he

definitely had gotten the short end of the stick when it came to the light injuries. He could feel that his back had quite a lot of scratches around his shoulder blades, the pain of which was particularly pronounced whenever he had to use the muscles in that area to move about. The same could be said about all the bite marks he had accumulated on his neck and shoulders, some of which were only in the beginning stages of scabbing after Bakugou's teeth had broken and perforated the skin. None of those injuries were worrying or would be a hindrance to his daily life and job, but it did put into perspective how rough and heated up their lovemaking could get at times.

Deep down, I'm not the only one who has some issues with self-control and destructive strength, noted Todoroki in the back of his mind, softly nodding his head in agreement with that evaluation. He was the most obvious about it since it ended up leaking into their daily life, but Bakugou wasn't too far off himself without a shadow of a doubt. His back currently looked the way it did because he clung too strongly to him and ended up scratching him whenever his grip slipped. Then, there was his habit of biting Todoroki, whether as a petty payback or because he was so lost in the throes of passion that he couldn't keep his strength in check. Seeing as Bakugou was equally as muscled and strong as Todoroki, of course those accidental mishaps had some very visible (and slightly painful) consequences.

However, be that as it may be, Todoroki didn't mind it too much at the end of the day. He found Bakugou to be so cute whenever he was clinging to him for dear life or trying to muffle his erotic voice by biting onto him. Some scratches and painful bites were a low price to pay for how great that sight and the sex were.

Oh. I should stop thinking about this, or I'll get in trouble, Todoroki suddenly remembered, his body jolting into a straighter crouched-down position. If he kept replaying the memories of last night while watching Bakugou washing himself, he was guaranteed to pop a boner right there and then. His 'husband' already called him a closeted pervert as it was; he did not want his reputation to get even worse by acting like a total degenerate while they were taking a bath together.

Todoroki made sure he was in his best behaviour throughout the whole showering process, wanting to freely collect the rewards of all of his hard labour afterwards. He even cooperated without a single complaint when Bakugou once again passive-aggressively told him to look away as he got his lower half cleaned from all remnants of lube and residue of other bodily fluids. It went without saying that Todoroki was still very much interested in seeing the full cleaning process (and maybe even doing it himself if Bakugou ever granted him the honour), but he was also aware that it was not happening any time soon. Todoroki was a patient man when he put his mind to being one. He could wait until the right time came.

Once Bakugou was done with that portion of his bath, he unsteadily wobbled to the bathtub, which he actually managed to climb inside all on his own (much to Todoroki's disappointment, in all honesty).

"Haa… Now this hits the spot…" sighed Bakugou as he leaned his back against the inner wall of the bathtub, the back of his head dropping over the top edge. The bathtubs in their new apartment were a whole lot more spacious than the ones in their former ones, so he could easily stretch his body and legs while remaining fully submerged in the hot water.

"Don't hog the whole bathtub. I want to go in too," said Todoroki, rushing a bit more with the conclusion of his own showering. His 'spouse' seemed to be having such a nice, relaxing soak in the bathtub. Of course he was dying to join him and relish that goodness too.

"It's first come, first served," snickered Bakugou, turning his head slightly so he could mischievously smirk at Todoroki. "You should have thought about that before you dragged me into your bathroom."

"The bathtub is big enough for both of us," deadpanned Todoroki, even though he was kind of contradicting his prior words. He couldn't really accuse Bakugou of hogging the whole tub while also claiming they could both easily fit in there. Such were the dilemmas of having

such a devilishly teasing ‘spouse’...

“Is it now?” remarked Bakugou, sliding his body right into the middle of the bathtub. He then lifted his arms from under the water and placed them on top of both lateral edges of the tub, before also propping up one of his legs over the outer wall. There was still some space inside of the bathtub here and there, but he was doing one heck of a good job occupying as much of the tub as his tall body allowed it. To finish it off, Bakugou victoriously smirked while making direct eye contact with his ‘husband’. “You were saying?”

“.....” For some reason, that smug interjection had really poked Todoroki’s competitive streak. He promptly ended his shower right there and then, just so he could prove Bakugou wrong for good and, in the process, claim his rightful place inside of that bathtub. He walked up to it and carefully climbed over the outer wall without knocking down Bakugou’s perched leg, towering over his ‘husband’ while standing inside of the bathtub to first analyse the current situation from an upwards perspective. Bakugou was still gleefully smirking, confident that there wasn’t much Todoroki could do.

In a way, he was correct. Bakugou was right in the middle of the bathtub, using his tall frame to his benefit and taking over more than two thirds of the spacious tub by spreading his arms and legs wide. Todoroki didn’t even need a toddler’s level of spatial awareness to understand that there was just no way for him to soak inside of the bathtub in any relaxing capacity without Bakugou first adjusting his position.

That is, if he went about it the normal way, following the regular societal rules to sharing a bathtub with others.

Since the person he was with was literally the man he was ‘married’ to, Todoroki didn’t need to worry about intruding on a complete stranger’s personal space. He could just drop his body wherever and whichever way, and force Bakugou to adjust to it by sticking

uncomfortably close to him.

“Argh…!” yelped Bakugou, not only getting water splashed straight to his face when Todoroki lowered his body into the bathtub and suddenly elevated the level of the water, but also getting his body squished against the tub’s inner lateral wall as his ‘husband’ squeezed himself into the small gap between him and the opposite lateral wall. Given that the bathtub had a rectangular shape and Bakugou was leaning his back against the smaller side, it was a very tight squeeze to fit two muscled adult men in there. Bakugou was forced to use his brilliant escape artist skills to unstuck himself from that awkward position, it being way too hard to tolerate with his current sore lower back. However, that gave Todoroki the perfect opportunity to pounce on him from behind and grab his slender waist, which he then pulled back towards himself to cage Bakugou in the exact same spot as during their previous shared bath: sat down between his legs with his back glued to Todoroki’s broad chest. Bakugou hissed, also splashing some more water around with his rage-induced flailing. “Seriously!?”

“I told you it’s big enough for the two of us,” deadpanned Todoroki, calmly leaning his chin over Bakugou’s shoulder despite the hissy wiggling coming from him.

“You and your clingy antics are fuckin’ unbearable!” growled Bakugou, getting twice as poutier once he realized that resistance was futile against the stubborn grip around his body. “I seriously can’t wait for the day you drop dead in the middle of the street, and I’m finally free from your sticky little claws!”

“Just focus on the brighter side,” said Todoroki in an attempt to calm down his ‘husband’s’ hissy fit. He also added some soothing pats against the side of his sculptured torso, though that probably only made Bakugou even angrier as he barked, ‘What brighter side!?’ at him. “With me in here, you won’t have to worry about the bath water dropping a single degree in temperature.”

“I’m pretty darn sure these bathtubs already come included with that feature…” grumbled Bakugou, pinching and pulling at the back of Todoroki’s hand to get it far, far away from him.

“Yeah, but I can do it better and faster,” Todoroki pointed out, moving his hand away from the side of his ‘husband’s’ torso like requested, but only so he could change it to another location. He softly pressed the palm of his left hand against Bakugou’s lower back, eliciting a small flinch out of him by accident. Even though the touch had been so light and measured, it seemed the soreness was bad enough that even that might have felt slightly uncomfortable for him when done without any warning. With that in mind, Todoroki was twice as careful as he ever so lightly activated his fire Quirk and warmed up his hand. “I can also apply some heat to the sore areas of your body. That will help you recover more easily and get your walking ability back to normal faster, right?”

“…You better not be up to any funny business with that idiotic, perverted brain of yours,” protested Bakugou while throwing a very suspicious glance over his shoulder. Given the latest developments in their marriage of convenience, something as outwardly kind and convenient as that could very well take a turn into sexual territory in a matter of seconds whenever his ‘spouse’ was concerned…

“I’m not. I’m just taking responsibility for my own lack of self-control and previous perverted actions,” deadpanned Todoroki, part of his admission of guilt coming across as insincere due to his expressionlessness. In his own way, however, he was being fairly honest and straightforward. If something as small as this could help Bakugou’s body recover just a little bit faster, he wanted to give it a try. “And before you accuse me of it, no, I don’t have any questionable intentions in mind with any of this. I also won’t touch you in any way you might categorize as ‘perverted’ and intend to stop the moment you tell me to. Plus… I do agree with you about my lack of self-control and how easily I get seduced by you, even if I don’t see it as entirely my fault. That’s why I’ve decided that I need to work on that, too. I’d really like to continue having sex with you, and for that, I can’t let it get in the way of your job as a pro hero and your other daily activities.”

“Hmph! Just for the record, I could still kick your ass in my current condition,” scoffed Bakugou, facing forward once again with a very haughty and prideful turn of his head. “I think this goes without saying, but I’ve trained hard every single day to be able to endure far worse injuries than a measly sore back. You could break my legs and arms, and I’d still make a blood splatter out of you. Don’t underestimate how durable my body is!”

“Oh. So does that mean I don’t need to hold back while we’re having sex after all?” asked Todoroki, his head slightly cocked to the side as he perked up at his interpretation of what Bakugou had just claimed.

“Hell…! …no…? …No, yeah, you should…? Wait… No…???” In the middle of denying Todoroki as readily as possible, Bakugou ended up confusing himself. Did he want his ‘husband’ to hold back at the cost of coming across as so frail and weak that he needed some accommodations while getting laid? Or did he want Todoroki to not hold back for the sake of his pride, even though he would have to deal with this pain-in-the-ass recovery process afterwards? Bakugou frowned, unable to pick which of the options was the lesser of two evils.

“How about we give this a shot first before you try to come up with a decision?” suggested Todoroki, inwardly chuckling at Bakugou’s endearing indecision. He could almost see the gears turning inside his brain, running at full speed as they tried to figure out what was the most beneficial solution to this big conundrum. It was, however, a bit of a philosophical question, as there wasn’t a right or wrong answer per se. At the end of the day, it solely depended on how Bakugou (and Todoroki, too, of course) wanted to approach this new facet of their temporary joint livelihood.

“Grrr…” Despite the annoyed low growling, Bakugou didn’t retort back at Todoroki, giving the impression that, in a roundabout way, he agreed with that plan to postpone his decision. It also meant he was giving Todoroki his okay to proceed with this makeshift ‘sore back

treatment'. "I'm blowing up with you and this bathtub the moment you get too handsy for my liking. Understood?"

"I already told you I don't have any dubious intentions in mind," sighed Todoroki, slightly heartbroken that he had gained such a nefarious reputation in his 'spouse's' eyes. He still did as promised and put the fire side of his Quirk to good use, focusing it only on the palm of his left hand while carefully keeping it lightly pressed against Bakugou's lower back. In simple terms, Todoroki had turned his hand into a human heating pad, one which he could easily regulate to whichever temperature would benefit proper healing and relaxation the most. "Is this too strong? Should I lower my temperature a bit?"

"...It's fine…" grumbled Bakugou, his pouting only escalating further. He knew Todoroki didn't mean anything else by it, but it still bothered him to be the target of someone else's concern and care. His entire being was screaming at him, telling him to kick Todoroki to the curb and go seek some relief for the soreness with a method that did not involve the actions of another.

But Bakugou was already there, so what could he do? Getting out of the bathtub when he still wasn't done with his long soak in that steaming water wouldn't do him any good. Wobbling around like a newborn fawn while returning to his bedroom would also take a big hit on his prideful, manly persona. There were simply no benefits to ending this here, and plenty to lose from cancelling it halfway through. That's why Bakugou ultimately decided to swallow his complaints and just make do with it, aiming to be as quick about it as possible.

His tepid calmness and the comfortable silence that installed itself inside of the bathroom gave Bakugou plenty of time to think about stuff, be it this ongoing healing event, be it everything that had led to it. Some of it made him want to stuff his elbow into Todoroki's gut, while other parts got him inwardly grumbling to his own buttons. He thought about it, and thought some more, and then gave all of those thoughts yet another thought.

All of that thinking came to a head (no pun intended) when he had unconsciously rage-baited himself with all of that circular thinking revolving around a single person. Thankfully, that rage-baiting happened in a controlled environment and while Bakugou was pretty calm and relaxed. Perhaps that was why his incoming attack took a very… unorthodox turn.

Without so much as saying a single peep, Bakugou turned slightly around, the movement of which forced Todoroki to lift his chin from his shoulder. That suited Bakugou just fine, as it had placed his 'husband's' head in the optimal position for what was to come.

Bakugou then suddenly kissed Todoroki. And not with a little-peck-and-run-away kind of kiss; he put some oomph into it and made it as obvious as he could that he was doing so on purpose.

"…K-Katsuki…?" said Todoroki, blinking his heterochromatic eyes a couple of times in his current expressionless flabbergasted condition. That one he had definitely not seen coming, and because of that, he wasn't quite sure how he was supposed to react to it.

"You swore you weren't gonna do anything perverted right now, didn't you?" pointed out Bakugou, his lips slowly curling into a mischievous, particularly impish smirk. "Then that means now's the perfect time to torture you some more with kisses. After all, no matter how much you might want to do it, you can't touch me in *that* way at all. Isn't that right?"

"…You're evil," mumbled Todoroki, a small frown surfacing on his expressionless demeanour. Here he was, going out of his way to purposely hold himself back and keep Bakugou's well-being above all of his wants and desires. And yet, what he got out of it wasn't a 'thank you' or some compliments on his good behaviour, but a seductive temptation designed specifically to sweetly torture and twist him

around his ‘spouse’s’ little finger. That was possibly the most Bakugou Katsuki thing that Todoroki had ever seen Bakugou Katsuki do in his entire life…

“I’m just kindly helping you with that self-control training, out of the goodness of my heart,” snickered Bakugou, not a single aspect of his current devilish expression seeming all that kind and good. He was 100% aware of what he was doing and the possible repercussions if his provocative teasing went sideways. However, he also trusted Todoroki enough to know he would not go back on his word under this type of circumstance, no matter how much he tried to incite and spark a reaction out of him.

“You better get ready for when I get my revenge…” grumbled Todoroki, his expressionless sulking getting slightly more pronounced on his face. He kept the palm of his hand carefully pressed against Bakugou’s back, but his arms did tighten somewhat more around his waist. From the tame yet so alluring reactionary snickering that squeezed out of his ‘husband’, he seemed to be more amused by it than actually worried. *I can’t tell if he’s underestimating me and my tenacity, or if he’s simply that comfortable with being in this sort of position with me. I’d hope it’s the latter, but you never truly know with Katsuki…*

“Ohh~ How scary~” Bakugou remarked with a healthy dose of sarcasm and playfulness. “Are you also going to tell on me to your mommy and daddy while you’re at it?”

“No, but I might really make it so we can’t leave *‘our’* bed for at least 24 hours straight,” deadpanned Todoroki, going along with the light-hearted banter if only so he wouldn’t lose any more ground against his competitive ‘spouse’.

“Hah! Either you’re seriously overestimating your prowess in bed, or seriously overestimating the limits of the human body,” snorted Bakugou while rolling his eyes around at that nonsensical claim. What

Todoroki was ‘threatening’ him with was an impossible feat, no matter how anyone looked at it.

“Or maybe you’re still underestimating how hard I’ve been trying to *not* leave you bedridden,” Todoroki pointed out as he chuckled softly. He couldn’t help but give a quick kiss to Bakugou’s cheek when he saw the pouty frown his comeback had resulted in.

“Like hell you’d ever be able to pull off something like that…” grumbled Bakugou, though the biting tone of his voice came across as slightly uncertain. With their track record to date and how heated up they both got, there was a small, tiny, insignificant possibility of something as ludicrous as that happening, but that wasn’t something Bakugou was ready to admit out loud any time soon.

“We won’t know until we try,” said Todoroki, using the exact same response that Bakugou had previously said concerning his current (in)ability to walk.

“E-Enough with this conversation already!” yelped Bakugou, ducking his head sideways so he could splash some water on Todoroki’s face without getting caught in the crossfire. He had officially lost the upper hand and, as such, had decided to take a tactical retreat back to the same comfortable silence of earlier.

Todoroki simply chuckled some more while shaking his head around to remove the droplets of water sliding down his face. He then once again leaned his chin on Bakugou’s shoulder while carefully sinking their upper bodies deeper into the steaming water.

He also agreed that it was time they put their entertaining bickering aside and enjoyed their bathtime cuddling, as who knew when exactly he’d be able to savour such an event once again.

Chapter 58

“I’m seriously getting sick and tired of being handled like a useless piece of luggage that needs to get carried around…” Bakugou grumbled, arms crossed over his chest as he was taken from the bathroom back to the bedroom. This time around, Todoroki was carrying him under his arm, his legs dangling only an inch or two above the floor. A damp towel was wrapped around his waist, but that was about it as far as his still semi-naked appearance went.

“Would you rather I start carrying you bridal style?” deadpanned Todoroki, fully aware that there was no actual winning ‘carrying position’ when it came to his fussy ‘husband’. Hence, the very in-theme joke that came out of his mouth. They might have already gotten ‘married’, but Bakugou was still technically the person he had gotten instead of one of his father’s ‘ideal brides’. So, again, technically, he *was* Todoroki’s ‘bride’.

“So long as you don’t mind dying five seconds later, be my fuckin’ guest,” retorted Bakugou, the frown on his face deepening. He felt so very tempted to shove his elbow against Todoroki’s guts, but he controlled himself and allowed him to finish the transportation back to the bed. Barely.

“That was just a joke, in case you didn’t notice,” explained Todoroki after a small sigh. Bakugou might be physically tired in quite a lot of different ways, but his petty nature and potty mouth were still as energetic as usual. One wouldn’t think he was currently unable to walk properly from the begrudging tone of his voice.

“Yeah, no shit, Sherlock,” groaned Bakugou while rolling his eyes at Todoroki’s needlessly obvious remark. “You might be frustratingly dense and a total moron in a lot of regards, but you still have a good sense of self-preservation. Unlike a few other morons we’re unfortunately acquainted with…”

“I’ll make sure to keep it that way,” acknowledged Todoroki with a small, expressionless nod of his head as he carefully lowered his ‘spouse’ onto the bed. No one was going to be dropped or fall while under his watchful gaze ever again, or so Todoroki had promised himself a while ago. He let Bakugou do the rest of the work and sit up straight on the bed all on his own. After making sure he was all settled, Todoroki turned around and walked up to his wardrobe, where he began looking around for a few pieces of clothing. As soon as he found what he had been searching for, he made a straight beeline back to Bakugou.

“What?” asked Bakugou, an eyebrow slightly arched as he saw Todoroki motioning those pieces of clothing towards him.

“It might be summer, but you will catch a cold if you stay naked for too long,” explained Todoroki, briefly dropping his gaze from Bakugou’s grumpy face to the clothes he was holding. “You can wear these for the time being. They’re on the smaller side, so they should fit you just fine.”

“Fuck you too!” hissed Bakugou, his crimson eyes turning into glaring daggers at the ‘smaller’ comment. Sure, he was shorter than Todoroki, but he was still fairly tall for Japanese standards. He wasn’t about to be demeaned so bluntly with this backhanded offering just because of a few centimetres of height difference! “Go get some clothes from my room! Now!”

“I don’t want to,” Todoroki refused without missing a beat. He wasn’t as petty or stubborn as his ‘husband’, but hadn’t he promised to get some payback for what had happened earlier in the bathroom? Well, Todoroki would consider that petty revenge to have been accomplished so long as Bakugou were to wear these clothes right here and now. They weren’t anything out of the ordinary or even embarrassing to the wearer - it was a simple pair of underwear and a loose-fitting t-shirt. In a way, it was pretty similar to the style Bakugou himself wore almost every day. The only difference was that

the t-shirt was probably a size or two bigger than what Bakugou typically had on; though not by a lot, as he did tend to wear baggier clothes rather than form-fitting ones. To make sure that there was no way for Bakugou to weasel out of wearing his clothes, Todoroki was smart enough to add a little verbal bait to get him to cooperate with his petty revenge. “If you want to wear your own clothes, you can go get them yourself once you’re able to walk normally again. Until then, just put these on.”

“I’d rather be naked,” grumbled Bakugou, every single cell in his body screaming at him not to fall for that obvious goading. Todoroki had another thing coming if he thought he could use against him the same aggravation methods that Bakugou partook in daily.

“Are you sure about that?” asked Todoroki, his head ever so innocently tilted as he ran his heterochromatic eyes from Bakugou’s pouty face all the way down to his naked torso. “I have yet to get my revenge for that earlier kiss torture. And you’re looking pretty inviting right now. Should we use this opportunity to give that 24-hours-in-bed thing a try?”

“Begone, you damn perverted demon…” hissed Bakugou with a clenched jaw, readily yanking the clothes out of Todoroki’s hands in a move that was through-and-through 10% passive, 90% aggressive. He promptly put on the t-shirt, wanting to cover his exposed torso as soon as possible before this ‘husband’ was tempted into going after his sensitive chest for what already felt like the millionth time. Bakugou was about to move on to the next piece of clothing when he came to a halt. “Wait, this is all? Where’s the rest?”

“I don’t think any of my pants would fit you,” Todoroki pointed out, sort of getting the gist of what Bakugou was talking about without needing a direct question about the missing clothing item. He could also sort of predict what Bakugou was about to hiss at him next, so he preemptively added, “I don’t usually wear shorts, and the few ones I do have are all training clothes I mainly keep at my hero agency.”

Well, to be honest, I do have a few pairs here at home, for when I train on my days off and don't feel like going all the way to the training facilities at the agency, but lending one of them to Katsuki would defeat my current purpose so I'm just not going to mention any of that for now, inwardly added Todoroki, his face outwardly getting more blank and stony as those thoughts crossed his mind.

"I can easily fold the pants legs a few- Hey, don't just turn around and pretend you can't hear me!" groaned Bakugou, annoyed that he even had to spell out the easiest solution to that 'problem'. However, as he was doing so, Todoroki turned back around and returned to his wardrobe, very obviously ignoring him while he went to get some clothes for himself next. Bakugou clicked his tongue in annoyance, grumbling to himself under his breath right afterwards as he unwillingly put on the underwear he was given and, only then, removed the towel from around his waist. Free from his previous nakedness, Bakugou now had the leeway to ball up the towel and throw it straight at the back of Todoroki's head.

Truly childish… Todoroki chuckled in the back of his mind, even though he remained completely expressionless as he glanced at Bakugou and his stuck-out tongue. He moved on with his changing after setting that towel aside, while also restarting their back-and-forth conversation. "What should we do about breakfast? I doubt you're in a condition to cook anything too elaborate right now. It's also pretty late already since we slept for so long."

"All of that is your fault, so you fix it," scoffed Bakugou, adjusting his sitting position so he could pull his feet from the floor and sit half cross-legged on the bed.

"You know my cooking repertoire is still extremely limited, especially when it comes to breakfast meals," deadpanned Todoroki, not even bothering to try to defend himself this time around. He was indeed the reason why his 'husband' couldn't stand for long enough to get some food done, at least for the time being.

His makeshift sore-back treatment had worked somewhat in terms of alleviating some of the pain. However, it hadn't helped much to fully restore Bakugou's waking ability. Or, to be more precise, Bakugou could walk (somewhat) but at the cost of looking like a toddler giving his very first steps and all the accidental tumbles that went along with such a learning process. Todoroki would know, as that was precisely what had happened when Bakugou tried to get out of the bathtub on his own. The only reason his 'husband' didn't crack his head open on the tiled floor was that Todoroki also had god-tier reflexes and caught him right in the nick of time.

But that was besides the point.

"I'm fully aware of that, thank you very much," sighed Bakugou with a fed-up roll of his eyes. "Plus, you still haven't gotten my approval or permission to use my kitchen. So you cooking breakfast is obviously out of the question."

"What am I supposed to do, then?" asked Todoroki, walking back to the bed now that he too was done putting on the first few clothes that he had come across.

"Just go buy something somewhere or whatever," said Bakugou while dismissively shrugging his shoulders. He placed both of his hands on the bed and leaned back a little bit, so he could more easily peer up at his stupidly tall 'husband'. "Actually, you should do that *and* get some groceries. We still have enough for today and maybe even tomorrow's breakfast, but we might as well clear a few additional tasks with a single outing."

"Sure, I can do that," acknowledged Todoroki with a quick nod of his head. He was more than happy to be of use to Bakugou while he recovered, all the more so if doing so would also prove to him once and for all that he was no longer the useless 'husband' that he had married the previous week. Todoroki was still far from the perfect 'spouse', but he definitely wanted to graduate from the label of

‘incompetent’ as soon as possible. However, all that got him was a silent, doubtful stare from Bakugou. Todoroki deadpanned, “I swear I will follow your shopping list down to a T and not add unnecessary things to the shopping basket without your approval first.”

“Heh, I’ll believe that once I see it,” snorted Bakugou, a knowing smirk already creeping into his lips. He motioned his hand forward and curled his fingers a couple of times in a beckoning motion. Without needing further instructions, Todoroki passed him his smartphone after unlocking it so the shopping list could be written directly in his notes app.

While Bakugou did that, Todoroki went to get himself ready to leave, which included not only getting all the stuff he’d need for his solo shopping mission but also grabbing a few of Bakugou’s belongings from the living room area and bringing them over to his bedroom. The main things had been his smartphone and the notebook where he had been jotting down his ‘cooking lessons' until Todoroki interrupted him with the wedding ring exchange conversation the previous night. But he also made sure to bring him a bottle of water from the fridge, as Bakugou would most likely want to have something to drink while waiting for his breakfast to be delivered.

“From the top of my head, I think that’s all,” said Bakugou once Todoroki returned to his bedroom and stopped by the bed to give him his things. As soon as his hands were free, he gave him his smartphone back and then went to take a sip from the water bottle. “Do you have any questions?”

“Not really, no,” confirmed Todoroki as he methodically and very seriously ran his eyes down the list of items to be purchased. “Ah, but there are a few things that we’re missing that aren’t in here. Like condoms.”

“Pffft…!” All of the water that Bakugou meant to swallow and rehydrate himself sputtered out of his mouth like a high-speed geyser.

Some water was still dripping from his wet lips as he blurted out, “Excuse you?”

“We used them all last night,” explained Todoroki with the calmness of someone relaying a very basic fact of day-to-day life rather than a possibly embarrassing remark regarding their sex life.

“Yeah, right. There’s no way that’s true,” scoffed Bakugou with a dismissive roll of his eyes. Todoroki had most likely made some sort of mistake with his dense brain and clumsy antics, just that. To prove him wrong, Bakugou leaned his body sideways on the bed while reaching out to the drawer where they were keeping those items. But the moment he grabbed the package that supposedly contained the condoms, he could already tell that it was foreshadowingly light for how it was supposed to be. In a rush, Bakugou opened it and flipped it upside down over the bed. However, nothing whatsoever fell off from its bare insides. “Are you fuckin’ for real!?”

“Yes, we have certainly been fucking for real,” said Todoroki with a serious nod of his head, wanting to confirm that no part of it had been dreamt or hallucinated, and neither had they been treating their sexual encounters nonchalantly. In their own way, they had been going all out right from the start. That was how they ended up using that entire package of condoms in what could be considered record time.

“Shut your dense trap!” hissed Bakugou, throwing the empty package at Todoroki and hitting him square in the face with it. “And don’t you dare buy more! We’re out, so we’re out! Forever! And without them around, you can no longer use the ‘wedding gift’ as an excuse either! This time for sure, we are definitely not having sex ever again! EVER!”

And we’ve gone full circle back to this ‘we’re never, ever doing it again’ conversation… Todoroki sighed in the back of his mind, not all that worried about Bakugou’s hissy claims and unreasonable demands. Every single time his ‘husband’ had said something along those lines,

they ended up having sex again not even 24 hours later. If anything, that sentence was akin to raising an R18 event flag in their current dynamic. Todoroki truly had nothing to worry about aside from the unserious bickering and physical aftercare that followed their heated up nights. *Yeah, I'm definitely buying more today. Even if we don't end up doing anything tonight or during the weekend, it's better to be safe than sorry.*

"Hey, I know very well what's crossing your mind right now!" admonished Bakugou while rolling his body onto his back so he could more easily kick Todoroki's upper leg. "We definitely ain't doing it! Got it!?"

"Yeah, yeah…" sighed Todoroki, this time outwardly. He still didn't believe Bakugou's stubborn insistence on this subject, but he wasn't about to waste his time arguing back and forth with him on it. He'd much rather use his time wisely on some other thing. The kicking itself was pretty light (in part due to Bakugou's tiredness, but also because he wasn't being serious with his retaliation), but Todoroki still gently grabbed his shin to bring it to an end and placed his leg back down on the bed. "Since I'm going outside on my own, I'm thinking of running a few other quick errands before coming back home. Is there anything else you want me to grab while I'm doing that? I mainly want to update my new address in a few places, but I don't mind stopping by somewhere else if you need something I can't buy at the grocery store."

"No, I'm good," scoffed Bakugou with a moody tone, once again adjusting his relaxed position so he could finally go back to doing what he had started the previous night. He lay down flat on his belly, notebook open on the page where he had left off right in front of him. "Just don't take too long. And don't you dare eat anything while you're out and about doing your stuff. If I'm going to be made to wait for my breakfast, you can bet your ass you're gonna have to wait too."

"Okay. Any requests in particular for your food?" said Todoroki, inwardly chuckling at his 'husband's' selfish demand. Or was it? He was indeed going to make Bakugou wait a bit longer for some food

than initially planned. And if Todoroki himself was pretty hungry after such a physically demanding night, he couldn't imagine Bakugou being much different either. The best way to go about his errands today was most likely to only update his personal information in the locations that were close by or wouldn't take too long, and then finish the rest once they went back to work.

"I'm not picky. Just make sure it's enough," noted Bakugou while offering a small dismissive shrug with his shoulders. His brain was already moving on to the task in front of him, and he could no longer be bothered to be too passive-aggressive or sarcastic with his ongoing conversation with Todoroki.

"Got it," acknowledged Todoroki with a single small nod of his head. Bakugou's answer was possibly the worst kind someone could get when the topic was food, but it seemed he would have to wing it somehow. He knew that Bakugou had a preference for spicy food, but aside from that, he was open to eating almost anything - sweet, salty, and everything in between. The game plan for the outing was for Todoroki to get his errands done first, then go grocery shopping and, finally, grab something for their late breakfast (or brunch, if you will) on his way back home. *There are quite a few stores and restaurants in our neighbourhood aside from the shopping district, so I'm sure I'll be able to find something nice for us to eat.*

With that settled, Todoroki began leaving his bedroom… or at least, that was his intention. But his legs refused to part ways from the spot they had planted themselves on. Even though he knew he should get going and get all of those side quests completed as fast as possible, Todoroki was finding it unusually hard to leave. The main reason for that was, well… quite simple, actually.

All Bakugou was doing at the moment was continuing to jot down the recipes he had taught Todoroki already while leisurely sprawled on his bed. That was all. There wasn't anything special behind it, and Bakugou wasn't up for any of his unconscious or otherwise seductive shenanigans.

However, there was something about this entire setting that Todoroki found tremendously captivating, or maybe even downright arousing.

Huh. I had no idea I'm into others wearing my oversized clothes, Todoroki commented to his own buttons, his heterochromic eyes taking their sweet time checking out Bakugou's laid-down position. There wasn't anything inherently sexual about his current appearance - Bakugou was simply wearing an oversized t-shirt that covered his body all the way down to his buttocks and a pair of boxers. It was a pretty casual getup, one that they would only be able to wear while in the comfort of their new home, but nothing too scandalous per se. And yet, Todoroki found Bakugou to be twice as hot right now compared to under normal circumstances. Could it be that he had just inadvertently discovered that he's into that whole 'boyfriend shirt' thing that people in relationships went on about? *Hmm… No, that doesn't sound right. This might simply be yet another 'Bakugou Katsuki exclusive' thing, like that stuff about him coming across as super cute when he's acting like a menace…*

Todoroki did have a long track record of creating little rituals or exceptions that were only ever applied to Bakugou, after all. Like going out of his way to memorize every single one of his smiles or more heart-warming moments. Or his obsessive fondness for the delicious food that he cooked. Or even the leniency he gave to Bakugou's inherent personality, even though he wasn't necessarily a big fan of people who partook in abusive behaviours aimed at others. All of those things had only ever applied to Bakugou and no one else. Todoroki couldn't even remember ever having created such specific focus regarding a particular feature that he observed in someone else - except for Bakugou, of course.

Taking all of that into consideration, it wouldn't be all that strange if this captivating effect he was currently experiencing out of the 'boyfriend shirt' setting was happening only because Bakugou was the one doing it. If he had lent one of his t-shirts to pretty much anyone else, he wouldn't even give it a second thought or glance. But with Bakugou? Yeah, Todoroki was currently going through this

humongous internal debate about whether to continue staring at Bakugou for as long as humanly possible or to rip the clothes off his body right this instant.

Oh, crap. I'm doing it again. Todoroki suddenly remembered himself, his body jolting slightly into a more alert state. He couldn't afford to be ogling Bakugou right now. He had some errands to run, hopefully before his 'husband' got all cranky and belligerent from extreme hunger. It wasn't as if Bakugou was going anywhere or getting changed out of this get-up any time soon, so he could continue enjoying this fine view once he was back home.

"I'm leaving then," said Todoroki, intending for that verbal statement to help him get back in gear and motivate him actually to follow through with it. Bakugou gave him a very tame, uninterested 'uh-huh', which was a bit of a damper, in all honesty. To make up for it, Todoroki quickly leaned down and delivered a small kiss to the top of Bakugou's head, only to retreat equally as fast.

"Grrr…" growled Bakugou, lifting his gaze from the notebook and whipping his head around at the speed of light so he could sulk and glare at Todoroki. "Stop half-assing your current mission and get going already, you damn useless slowpoke!"

Todoroki simply chuckled at that grouchy reaction and, this time for sure, began walking out of his bedroom. Bakugou would be having the whole apartment to himself while he was out and about, but he still made sure to close the bedroom door after he left the room to give him some privacy and peacefulness while he did his thing with the 'cooking lessons' notebook. (There might or might not have been some unconscious possessiveness involved in the act of closing off Bakugou inside his bedroom, but Todoroki was still far too unaware of all of that at the time to notice that little detail.)

Having a vehicle at his disposal would facilitate the conclusion of his errands, so Todoroki didn't have to think twice about grabbing the car

keys on his way to the door. It would save him both time and energy that he could later redirect back to his ‘spouse’.

Thoughts like that one truly put into perspective how much one’s world and schedule changed the moment they got married. Even though it was just a temporary marriage of convenience, he could no longer be the sole deciding factor in every facet of his day-to-day life. Bakugou and his needs and wants also needed to be taken into consideration, and then a compromise that was smack dab in the middle needed to be found.

It certainly wasn’t the kind of lifestyle that either of them was used to, as they valued their independence and solo way of life extremely highly. There was also a very much needed adaptation period, as mistakes and crossed boundaries were bound to happen as they adjusted to the new environment and shared living arrangement. But Todoroki had to admit that this state of affairs wasn’t all that bad, even in its current trial period.

I wonder if my parents’ marriage was also sort of like this at the start, Todoroki wondered as he drove himself to the first location included in his short list of errands. His parents hadn’t had a marriage of convenience, but rather a Quirk marriage organized by both sides of their families. In a nutshell, Enji wanted his children and possible bloodline successors to overcome the physical limitations of his hell flame Quirk and surpass him in the hero rankings, and Rei had been the perfect ‘bride candidate’ for such a goal, for reasons that went far above good Quirk compatibility. Enji eventually got what he wanted in the shape of his youngest son, and his maternal family also regained the standing and support they had been lacking after a long period of decline.

However, just because their Quirk marriage ended up having a bad ending with terrible repercussions that affected the entire country, it didn’t mean it also had a bad start. While it had been an arranged Quirk marriage right from the start, both his father and mother had always been aware of it and, in their own way, agreed to the idea. Rei had been as supportive of Enji’s goals as she could, even putting her

own body and life at risk multiple times by giving birth to four children in a very short span of time. The cracks and fractures that eventually led to that bad ending only started showing at a later stage, once the pressure, neglect and abuse began piling up over the shoulders of everyone involved, the children included.

Had the beginning of their Quirk marriage been as peaceful as Todoroki's fake marriage had been so far? Had they also had instances where they didn't know what was the best approach and ended up creating disagreements and arguments? Had they discovered new things about themselves as they adapted to their new shared life? Had they also had some moments where they wholeheartedly enjoyed each other's company?

Those sorts of questions and plenty more would cross Todoroki's mind every now and then, fully aware that he would never be able to get a proper answer to any of them. Of course, he could ask his parents about it, but… That didn't seem like a good idea to him. Both Enji and Rei had found the perfect balance for their fractured marriage after so much struggle and suffering, and Todoroki did not want to rehash any bad, triggering memories for either parent. He was fine with not knowing the truth and simply creating suppositions with the little information he had and his own anecdotal experience in the matter.

Either way it went, Todoroki was deadset on not emulating the past and repeating it either in the present or the future. He wasn't going to make the same mistakes his parents had with their Quirk marriage, even if his marriage to Bakugou was nothing more than a temporary means to a long-term end. He also wasn't going to allow old-fashioned family traditions that negatively affected others to survive the course of time. As far as he was concerned, the arranged marriage tradition had ended with his parents' Quirk marriage, and neither he, his siblings, nor any children that might result from his older brother's marriage would keep it alive. It was set to die with the youngest generation, no matter how much his father insisted on keeping it going.

Well, some could say that there's little to no difference between a marriage

of convenience and an arranged marriage, and they'd be correct. But I still don't think I'm following that family tradition in any shape or form, let alone in a way that Dad would ever approve, Todoroki noted in the back of his mind. For starters, the only people involved in the making of their marriage of convenience were the two people who had gotten married: Todoroki and Bakugou. Their families had no involvement in it, and a certain faction even opposed the whole marriage. They had discussed at length what their objectives were and why they had picked this route, and delineated a clear timeframe for when it was supposed to end and under what terms. Their fake relationship also didn't affect anyone else, but them - both sides of their families were being kept at a healthy distance, and no children would ever be involved in it. The only interference their 'relationship' had in the world at large was all the scandals and news headlines it had originated so far, but that hardly mattered in the great scheme of things. *No matter how I look at it, there's no similarity to my father's arranged marriage family tradition aside from the fact that there's no actual romantic relationship before the marriage happens. So no, it's definitely not the same, and it will never be the same, if I can help it.*

Plus, even if there had never been any romantic relationship between them, Todoroki did quite like Bakugou as a person. They had known each other for so many years and had worked together in so many instances, under all sorts of circumstances and scenarios. He couldn't call themselves close friends, and there was a certain distance brought about by their professional lives and lack of free time, but they still weren't complete strangers or mere acquaintances who had gotten married for a specific benefit or goal. They had an entire background story that had been written way before the fake marriage plan had even sprouted in Todoroki's brain.

Perhaps that and having full control over the entire fake relationship was what made their marriage of convenience so palatable - and even extremely fun and enjoyable - to Todoroki. It just wouldn't be the same with someone else. It had to be Bakugou. Definitely. Even if Bakugou hadn't also gained something from it, Todoroki couldn't imagine himself ever reaching out to anyone else for this unofficial team-up. It was a wonderful coincidence that this crazy plan just so happened to also benefit Bakugou and potentially solve his own set of problems, but Todoroki would still want him to be the other person if that hadn't been the case, no matter how much he would have had to

beg and plead with him.

Fast forward to now, and there were some moments where Todoroki found himself thinking that he didn't want their marriage of convenience and everything that came with it to end. Today marked one week since they had gotten married, and the timeline he envisioned himself following for the next year or so had unmistakably been thrown for a loop already. Force of habit… couldn't be used as an explanation, as they had only been living together for a couple of days and, before this, their personal lives were very much separate from one another. Laziness and dependence also didn't do the trick, as Todoroki could survive perfectly fine without Bakugou and vice versa. That had been how he had lived his entire life so far, after all. Deep down, Todoroki simply didn't want to go back to that before he had. And not because his life had become so much easier with Bakugou around, mind you!

Bakugou could stop cooking and doing half of the house chores, and Todoroki would still want to keep their cohabitation. They could pay twice or thrice as much for their new apartment as before, and Todoroki would still want to continue living where they currently were. Bakugou could deny him kisses, physical affection and sex from this day onward and forevermore, and Todoroki would still want to remain in their fake marriage. Even if Todoroki had absolutely nothing to gain and would have to spend the rest of his life giving or compromising, he'd still choose to keep the current status quo.

Of course, all of that was nothing more than a very exaggerated example. Todoroki highly doubted that Bakugou would radically change the dynamic they had created so far, mainly because it worked so well for both of them. There was space for growth and time to create a day-to-day lifestyle that accounted for their busy pro-hero schedules, but he couldn't see things becoming much different from how they currently were even once they returned to work.

There was also the fact of how much of a softie Bakugou truly was on the inside, despite looking like a demonic overlord most of the time. How else could Todoroki explain how easily he had folded about the

cooking after just a little bit of pestering? He could still remember vividly how many times Kaminari and company had begged and implored for Bakugou to share some of the food he cooked at the dorm's communal area; back then, he always told them to go take a hike (though with more colourful language), save for the few times he had been forced to give them a small portion by outside intervention (read: Aizawa or All Might).

Hm… Maybe Katsuki does like cooking for other people, but is just very particular about who those other people are? Todoroki marvelled to himself, that topic coming to mind as he went about the requested grocery shopping, the second-to-last task before he could finally go back home. That was the only credible supposition that Todoroki could come up with to explain why Bakugou had folded to his pestering, but not his friends'. *I wonder why he has no problem cooking for me, though? I always tell him it's good and thank him for it, but it's not like I excessively praise him and accommodate his self-centred ego. I've also been told quite a lot of times that I remain completely expressionless even when eating stuff that I really like, so it's not like the way I eat his food is very commendatory either…*

"I kinda wanna ask him why, but that would probably backfire on me, wouldn't it?" chuckled Todoroki, his voice but a whisper as he mumbled those words under his breath while picking up one of the items on the shopping list from the shelf. He would have to be left in the unknown for the time being, but maybe one day, he'd be able to find the solution to this Bakugou-related mystery. Time and patience did tend to work on getting Bakugou to eventually spill the beans, after all. Not to mention, Todoroki had plenty of both.

Yeah, that's right. I can just take my time figuring all of this out, Todoroki noted in the back of his mind while nodding outwardly at that conclusion. There was no need to rush or twist himself into knots trying to come up with an answer. They were but at the start of their unofficial mission. Todoroki had all the time in the world to figure out why he was so obsessed with Bakugou's cooking or why he already wished for their fake marriage to never end or even why his 'husband' always looked so darn cute and adorable and sexy and seductive and a million other descriptors that Todoroki never actually used for anyone

else in the world.

With such complicated but entertaining things constantly in his mind, his time out and about taking care of a myriad of errands went by in the blink of an eye. Now that the grocery shopping was completed according to Bakugou's shopping list (plus a few additional items that Todoroki just *had* to buy, no matter how much his 'spouse' nagged him for it later on), the only thing left in his mental task list was grabbing some late breakfast for both of them.

"What should I buy this time as my peace-keeping food offering to Katsuki?" mumbled Todoroki to his own buttons, his sunglasses-covered heterochromatic eyes being greeted by the intense summer sun the moment he stepped a foot outside of the grocery store. Rather than going to the shopping district near their new apartment, he had picked a bigger store right next to the last location he had visited to update his personal information. It was a popular commercial area, so the number of choices he had for their breakfast menu was conveniently that much bigger.

Todoroki looked around left and right down the bustling street, trying to decide which direction he should take in his final quest for the perfect offering to his 'husband'. Either side had several restaurants and food-related establishments that he could pick and choose from.

He had just made up his mind to start exploring the west side first when a certain voice suddenly reached his ears.

"Ah! Todoroki-kun! What a coincidence!"

"Oh." Todoroki halted and turned back around to look in the same direction where his name had just come from. There, he spotted two very familiar faces.

Todoroki had also unknowingly found a way to redirect Bakugou's future anger to somewhere else far away from him, but that was a story for a later time.

Chapter 59

“Nnngh… That should do for now…” Bakugou mumbled under his breath as he slowly, leisurely sat up on the bed and stretched his back and arms. He had been so focused on what he was doing and intent on putting the ‘cooking notebook’ up to date that he had spent the entire time since Todoroki had left lying on the bed, writing as if there was a deadline that needed to be met. Position-wise, it hadn’t been that bad, but of course, after a while, it would take a toll on anyone. Bakugou was not an exception to that, especially with his current sore back. After stretching, he grabbed his smartphone and took a peek at the time. “Tsk… He’s not back yet?”

He was starving here - doubly so after being made to write recipe after recipe, including the ones he planned on making later today - and yet his brainless, moronic, dense, annoying ‘husband’ was taking his sweet time coming back home with their breakfast!

“Just how long does it truly take to do a handful of errands and a bit of grocery shopping… Not this long, that’s for sure…” grumbled Bakugou, quite peeved as he lay back down against the bed’s headboard. Smartphone in hand, he angrily fiddled around with this app and that one, trying to distract himself with something while also doing his daily check on noteworthy news and announcements. The fact that most of his feeds were filled with news and posts about him and his personal life only enraged him even further.

Bakugou knew better than that, of course, but he definitely felt very inclined to join those comment sections and fight anyone who dared to make scandalous, ludicrous claims and theories about him. He wouldn’t, though. The purpose of fabricating a scandal was to get this sort of discourse going on social media and news articles. They *needed* the whole world to be talking about them the same way they talked about other public figures whenever they announced new truthful lore about their actual private life and relationships. That was the only way they could make sure their fake marriage was believable enough for both the common people and the ‘targets’ of their unofficial mission.

It vexed Bakugou to no end that, despite having gone this far already, there was still not a single peep coming from the group of lunatics that worshipped him like a living god of some sort. However, this was only week one of their 'marriage'. He had been aware right from the start that this would be a long war of attrition rather than a rapid succession of battle after battle. Periods where nothing of note happened, followed by incidents in which Bakugou could put a dent in their numbers, were to be expected.

"Well, at least I'm getting a convenient vacation out of it…" Bakugou mumbled to his own buttons, switching his attention from news about himself to news of the pro hero universe at large. Lately, he had been constantly badgered about being a workaholic who never actually clocked out (mainly because he had been doing his own investigation on the cult during his time off from work). Now, he could tell all of those people - Best Jeanist included - to fuck off, as he would soon be freshly out of a week-long break. Who cared that the so-called 'break' was still technically a part of his unofficial mission, so he had been technically working the whole time? The public perception that he had been on vacation for that long for his 'honeymoon' was all that mattered, deep down. Still, Bakugou did have his issues and complaints about the extended break, for a reason that would lead most people to facepalm themselves instantly. "Argh, man… I wanna wipe the floor with someone's face so bad… Can someone cause some more trouble around here so I can kick their asses? Those weaklings from yesterday were too easy! I need a challenge that truly gets my blood pumping!"

Bakugou's vexed beckoning was met with silence. The news at large, fortunately and unfortunately, also told him that the country was as safe as it had been when he clocked out the previous week. Even if Bakugou had been working, all he would be doing was taking his rounds in the peaceful outdoors and maybe catching a petty thief or two, or telling someone off for littering. It was quite the contrast compared to how dangerous and tense things had been a few years prior.

It was also why Great Explosion Murder God Dynamight would never be able to reach his goal of becoming the number one pro hero in Japan.

Suddenly, Bakugou heard some noise and movement coming from the other side of the closed door. He could tell right away that it was Todoroki finally returning home by the sound of dangling house keys and rustling plastic bags.

“It was about time,” groaned Bakugou while rolling his eyes at it. He got up from the bed, giving his body one last stretch to make sure he was actually capable of walking all the way to the living room area without making a complete fool of himself, and then made his appearance in the neighbouring division by slamming the door wide open. “What took you so long? I’m starving here!”

Caught off guard by Bakugou’s explosive entrance, Todoroki just stopped and stared at his ‘husband’ and his lovely get-up. The two other people who had accompanied him all the way back home did not take that as well as he did, however.

Uraraka turned slightly around after a small, embarrassed gasp, not wanting to stare at her fellow pro hero when he was so lightly dressed in his own home. Midoriya, unfortunately, had his entire face swatted by Todoroki’s big hand in the process of getting his eyes covered from that tantalising sight - the intention of which Bakugou remained totally unaware of, as he had bigger fish to fry right now.

“‘The fuck are they doing here?” growled Bakugou, the creases caused by his frown deepening even further as he crossed his arms over his chest and coldly glared at the intruders. He was clearly unhappy about having to host unannounced visitors. The moment Todoroki opened his mouth to explain himself, Bakugou immediately cut him off and hissed, “I don’t care about the reason. Out! Now!”

“C’mon, don’t be like that,” sighed Todoroki, settling down the bags he had been carrying on top of the kitchen counter while keeping his other hand right in front of Midoriya’s adamantly panicking face. “They didn’t come to visit us empty-handed. They brought both a gift and information.”

“Like I give a rat’s ass about gifts or info! Out!” ordered Bakugou, pointing in the direction of their front door with a jerk of his chin. “And you too, out. Leave the grub, get the hell out! You’re banned from this apartment for the next 24 hours!”

“Eh?” gasped Todoroki, his expressionless demeanour gaining a bit of a panicky undertone too. Why was he suddenly getting kicked out of his own home like that? He hadn’t taken *that* long while out and about on his errand run, had he? Or could it be that Bakugou had already seen through him and figured out that Todoroki had bought the very same items that he had been told not to?

“‘Eh’, my ass! Remind me what one of the very first rules we created was!” admonished Bakugou, furiously stomping towards the kitchen counter so he could grab the food haul and keep it all to himself. “Yeah, that’s right! Two yeses are needed to invite people over! And I don’t remember ever allowing the Shitty Nerd and Uraraka over! So out! All three of you! Go repent outside while brushing up on the house rules!”

“Oh. I was in such a rush to bring you your breakfast that I forgot about texting you about it,” said Todoroki, now calmly recalling the few conversations they had previously had while preparing to move in together. So that’s what Bakugou’s issue was… Todoroki couldn’t help but inwardly let out a huge sigh of relief. The worst-case scenarios he had been picturing didn’t end up being the source of his ‘husband’s’ bad mood, which meant that the problem in question could be easily fixed with a few upfront apologies. “My bad. I’ll be sure to remember that from now on. So, can you give me some leniency just this one time? Also, before we move on with this, I think you should go put some more clothes on.”

“You-! Grrr…” Bakugou would have liked to scream loud and clear that he was dressed the way he was because Todoroki had literally only given him two pieces of clothing when they were getting dressed, but he wasn’t about to expose himself like that in front of Midoriya and company. After menacingly glaring the shit out of his ‘husband’ for a couple of seconds more, he turned around and stomped towards his bedroom, the door of which he loudly slammed behind himself.

“Sorry about that,” said Todoroki, finally removing his hand from Midoriya’s face while also throwing an apologetic glance at Uraraka. “I guess your visitor gift strategy didn’t work all that well after all.”

“T-This is Kacchan we’re talking about here, so some curses and yelling were to be expected, ahaha…” Midoriya awkwardly laughed while scratching his cheek. What he hadn’t been expecting was the way his childhood friend was dressed, or the overreaction his best friend had had at the possibility of Midoriya seeing Bakugou in that sort of get-up. Both of them were truly getting comfortable in their new role as a ‘married couple’, weren’t they…? Not that Midoriya could say any of that out loud, so he just moved on with the conversation without touching on any of that. “I’m glad he didn’t actually forcibly kick us out, though. I wouldn’t put it past him to resort to violence or a couple of explosions to get us far away from your apartment…”

“I’m sorry you ended up getting roped into it too, Todoroki-kun,” apologised Uraraka while offering a small bow to her friend. The purpose of their visit was to help both of them out, not to cause any issues or tension in their current shared living arrangement…

“It’s fine. I am to blame for having forgotten about that rule in the heat of the moment,” deadpanned Todoroki, willing to admit that he had sort of contributed to the hissy fit they had just survived. “Besides, even if I had told him about it beforehand, he would have still kicked up a fuss about it. Anyway, make yourselves comfortable. I’ll go get you something to drink.”

“Are you sure that’s a good… Oh, o-okay.” Midoriya began asking if Todoroki was sure about continuing with their visit, given the reception they had just received from one of the residents, but his friend simply turned around and went into the kitchen to procure some refreshments from the fridge, as well as store away the items that he had bought at the grocery store that needed to be refrigerated. Midoriya exchanged a quick glance with Uraraka and, after nodding to each other, they went to take a seat at the dining table. Since they had Todoroki on their side, they might as well finish what they had already started - that’s what they had mutually agreed on without saying a single word to one another.

After a minute or two, Todoroki walked up to the dining table with a tray with two glasses of iced tea and the carrier bag that currently contained his and Bakugou’s breakfast. He first served his guests, for which he was politely thanked in return, and then started to take out the food he had bought for them. Bakugou's one and only instruction had been ‘make sure it’s enough’, so Todoroki went to a nearby bakery shortly after he had bumped into Midoriya and Uraraka. There, he bought both sweet and savoury breads and pastries, like choco cornets, custard cream bread, curry bread, and pizza nikuman. To help push all of that down the hatch, he also ordered a cup of iced coffee and another of iced latte, of which Bakugou could pick and choose from depending on what he felt like drinking that morning. Adding that to Midoriya’s and Uraraka’s gift - a box of several different doughnuts from a popular store that was all the rage lately -, they had enough food to feed two extremely hungry young men.

“I can see that you two had no issues with finishing the move,” remarked Uraraka as she gingerly looked around the living room and kitchen area of the spacious apartment. No one would be able to tell that they had just moved in, with how clean and organised the whole place looked. Then again, Bakugou was extremely fussy about that sort of thing, so really, was it truly that surprising that the result was something straight out of a pristine show house? “Are you getting used to your new home just fine? I know it’s just a temporary thing, but you might as well make sure you’ll have a comfortable time while at it.”

“Yeah, I quite like this place,” said Todoroki as he took a seat at the table too and patiently waited for Bakugou to come before he began eating. If he got to the food without him being present, he was guaranteed to be told off for it by his petty ‘spouse’; he might as well save himself from more bickering by allowing him to take first dibs on the entire breakfast menu. “Despite being three times as big as our previous apartments, it’s actually much cheaper to live here. Plus, it’s pretty close to both of our hero agencies and all other amenities we might need. For an apartment that only took him a few hours to find, I think it turned out to be a really great deal. I would definitely recommend this apartment to any future tenants that might be interested in it.”

“Eh? How!?” yelped Midoriya, his jaw nearly dropping to the floor due to the entirety of those unexpected comments. Perhaps he was still being plagued by the memories of how much of a headache it had been when he and Uraraka were looking for an apartment where they could live together. The whole process certainly hadn’t been stress-free, fast or cheap, to say the least. “It took us ages to find an apartment that fit all of our needs, and at the end of the day, we still had to pick something that was far above the budget we had initially set… How exactly did Kacchan find an apartment this nice that goes against everything that is well known about this nightmare housing market!?”

“He has his ways, I guess,” deadpanned Todoroki, not entirely sure how he was supposed to break the news to the couple. It felt a bit awkward and maybe even morbid to tell other people that the reason they were able to get such a huge discount on this luxurious apartment and move in almost right away was that the previous resident had been found deceased eerily close to the spot where they were currently chatting… Thankfully, Todoroki didn't have to provide any further explanation or information on the matter, as the conversation was cut short by the missing tenant’s return.

“As if I’d ever share any house searching tips with you, let alone tell you my secret to cheap housing,” scoffed Bakugou, still loudly

stomping around as he begrudgingly came back to the living room area. This time around, his appearance was more modest, with pants properly clothing his toned legs and even a light zip-up jersey over Todoroki's t-shirt to more easily keep all of those marks around his neck and collarbone away from prying eyes. His crimson gaze zeroed in on Midoriya as he sat down at the dining table next to Todoroki, a sharp, glaring glint cutting right through him alongside his caustic words. "Since you're oh-so-good at stalking and nerding out, I'm sure you don't need any advice in that area, to begin with."

"A-Ahaha…" Midoriya awkwardly laughed, unable to say anything back at that. He was guilty as charged in that regard, especially when it came to his childhood friend, so he couldn't deny the indirect accusations, even though they were ever so slightly exaggerated. To dispel some of that awkwardness, Midoriya cleared his throat and then reached out to the paper bag he had been carrying, which contained a stack of papers and printed documents neatly organised and labelled with additional information and pointers written in a few sticky notes here and there. "This is what I wanted to give you, Kacchan. I-I know you said not to butt in and let you do things your way, but all of this information was right at my fingertips, so I figured… why not?"

"Why am I surrounded by people who can't mind their fuckin' business?" groaned Bakugou as he rolled his eyes in annoyance. He yanked the papers out of Midoriya's hand quite aggressively, while his other hand went to grab a curry bread from the paper box they had been placed in by the bakery. That pretty much signalled to Todoroki that it was finally breakfast time, and he too grabbed one of the custard cream breads. Bakugou leisurely flipped through the papers as he took big bites out of the curry bread, savouring the blend of spices housed inside the deep-fried pastry immensely, thanks to how hungry he currently was. "Huh… How surprising."

"…!" Midoriya's entire face immediately lit up with a big, happy smile the moment those words left his childhood friend's mouth. Being yelled at and admonished for every little thing was pretty much how half of their communication with one another was performed, but being praised and acknowledged was a rarity that only came once in a

blue moon, if at all. The thought of him having actually been helpful to Bakugou and his unofficial mission, despite being so hesitant about interfering with it and in his ‘relationship’ with Todoroki, was actually a very nice change of pace, and something that made Midoriya happier than he could express with words.

However…

“You must have loads of free time on your hands if you can waste it gathering a bunch of worthless crap,” said Bakugou, instantly crushing all of Midoriya’s expectations and annihilating the happy grin on his face. He placed the stack of papers on the dining table and started flipping through them again, though he added some running commentary this time. “I already knew this. And this too. This one is unrelated to my case. Oh, I’ve already looked into this one, and it has nothing to do with that group of lunatics, so I brought all of this info, plus the other stuff I dug out, to the detectives currently working on it. This one is BS, and so is this one. Yup, already knew about this. And this. And this too. This one is also BS. This one has nothing to do with my case. These next two I also already found out about ages ago. And this last one is utter crap, too. Must be nice not to have any work to do and be able to freely browse the internet and social media for hours on end, huh?”

“Uhh… I-I tried my best with what I knew about the cult group and their nearly nonexistent presence in public forums and pages…” mumbled Midoriya, his body shrinking quite a bit under his childhood friend’s glaring gaze. “I thought I could eventually find some clue that would take me to a more concrete lead on them and their secret organisation. But they really are good at keeping their tracks hidden, down to how they recruit new members to their cult… They must be using one of the many encrypted communication apps that are so popular as of late…”

“Yeah, no shit, Sherlock,” sighed Bakugou while rolling his eyes dismissively. “I’ve arrested a few of them already. You think I don’t know which encryption service they use? We combed through every single one of their devices, both in their possession and at their

current address. But those asswipes nuke the group chat each time one of them gets caught and then start a new one somewhere else. By the time the ink on the warrant has dried and the detectives can legally go through their phones and laptops, there's barely any information that can be recovered, especially on the other members of the group chat."

"So they have a detailed security plan in place for when one of them gets caught, huh…" muttered Midoriya, a small frown appearing on his face as he thought more closely about that little detail.

"Since you know the encryption service they use, can't you get a warrant and bring it to their headquarters so their IT team can restore all the data from the server or group chat they deleted?" suggested Uraraka, having been closely listening to the conversation that whole time while sipping on her iced tea.

"It's… not that simple," said Midoriya while letting out a tired sigh. "These encryption services work under the golden rule that the privacy of their users is their main selling point and that it should be kept that way at all costs. The way the coding and encryption work also makes it so that even the developers aren't 100% in the know of how to crack that encryption, as a security measure. Even with a warrant, it would be very complicated to translate, so to speak, all the data in the servers into a language we can understand, even if it might be possible to recover the information from deleted servers and group chats. And, of course, there's also the way this sort of warrant might impact their business model in the long term. If these criminal investigations were to damage the company and their reputation, they would have grounds to sue the police force or even the government for lost revenue or defamation. Of course, I'm oversimplifying the whole thing for the sake of brevity. It's a whole lot more complicated than just getting a warrant and collecting any existing data that can be recovered after deletion, and the companies can't sue the police force all willy-nilly just because a criminal used their product and they're now under investigation. All of that is one of the many reasons why all sorts of cases and investigations take so long to be processed and solved."

“There’s also the fact that this is an unofficial mission, so getting warrants is a bit iffy,” added Bakugou at the same time he reached out for the iced latte next to the box of breads and pastries. He took a long sip from the straw and only then kept going. “When I catch one of those delusional morons and get them behind bars, it triggers an official investigation to make sure they stay locked up. But since group activities and even cults aren’t technically a crime or illegal, they are free to exist until there’s enough evidence to add them to some sort of watch-list. For now, they haven’t been causing enough trouble to be considered a criminal organisation, mainly because their members are being arrested as individuals, not as part of a specific group. At most, they are a fuckin’ nuisance and a headache I’d rather go without…”

“Only because you refuse to pursue the matter further through the official channels and are trying to fix the situation all on your own,” deadpanned Todoroki as he expressionlessly munched on his second treat, this time a pizza-flavoured nikuman.

“I’m the one they’re after, so I get to call the shots here, alright?” scoffed Bakugou, though not without first throwing a sideways glare at his ‘husband’. “They are a nuisance, not a world-ending threat. I can deal with them on my own just fine, with or without limited backup. Plus, they might be annoying as fuck, and I want them gone for good as soon as possible, but at least they spice up my days more than catching thieves or helping lost randos ever could.”

“W-What an awful thing to say, Kacchan…” nearly wept Midoriya, thanking the gods that they were having this conversation in a safe location rather than somewhere where they could be eavesdropped. “Boring days for pro heroes should be celebrated…”

“I beg to differ, but you do you, you goodie-two-shoes,” said Bakugou while he took his sweet time deciding on what to eat next, now that he was done with the curry bread. He picked a choco cornet as a change of pace and taste.

“Have they been causing trouble to both of you during your time off?” asked Uraraka, chuckling a little bit at Bakugou’s (perhaps too) honest words. She had the same opinion as her boyfriend on that matter, but she also couldn’t deny that Bakugou’s direct-to-a-fault opinion was a breath of fresh air around their trade. “I’ve heard about how you two ended up catching that group of thieves while you were out and about on that fake date yesterday.”

“That was just a coincidence. They weren’t connected to the villain cult group,” said Todoroki before he too got a hold of the remaining cup of iced coffee. He leisurely sipped on the refreshing beverage before he added, “Or so he claims.”

“Hey, what’s that supposed to mean!?” hissed Bakugou, throwing yet another sideways glare at Todoroki. “I told you their reaction to me was pretty darn telling, didn’t I? If they were one of those lunatics, they would have celebrated me being there rather than running away with their tails tucked between their legs!”

“You just never know. They’ve been so quiet lately that it’s starting to feel a bit… worrying,” pointed out Todoroki with a small shrug of his shoulders. “Whatever it is they are planning next, it’s taking them a good while to implement. It’s been over a week since you last made contact with and arrested one of their members, right? With all of this attention and cameras on us, it might be hard for them to reach out to you without getting instantly exposed. So wouldn’t it be plausible for them to start to outsource certain tasks to outsiders while the actual members focus on surveilling you and finding an opening to interact with you?”

“You know what? You might actually be on to something there, Todoroki-kun…” said Midoriya, his facial expression turning a whole lot more serious as he went into muttering mode. “The fact that they can stay hidden this well most likely means that their villain group isn’t all that big. And now that they are losing members thanks to Kacchan’s latest arrests, they might be suffering a bit from a lack of manpower. Which means that, one, they are going to be slower at making their next move, and two, they might have to resort to hiring

other criminal groups or even individuals to get some harder tasks done simultaneously. Dark part-time jobs and people in desperate need of money getting solicited to help out criminal organisations for a too-good-to-be-true price have been a very discussed topic these past few years. With their use of encrypted services and social media for recruitment, it wouldn't be too far-fetched to think they are also putting out ads and offers in secret dark part-time job forums and channels…"

"It's not like they are complete nobodies, so they probably have the funds to hire others to do the dirty work that doesn't have a direct involvement with me…" confirmed Bakugou, his tone a bit resentful that he was being made to agree with Midoriya's read on this subject. "One of the guys I recently arrested had a pretty nice daytime job with a chunky salary, which he was using to bankroll some of their activities. They're a cult; of course their main source of income and financial backing is their own members. Those morons are gonna squeeze themselves dry for the sake of their 'murder god' and then get arrested for it in the process. But just because they can and probably do, it doesn't mean that every single crime currently being committed around here is linked to them. I mean, why would they even need research-grade… computers…… Ah, crap!"

"It seems I was right after all," deadpanned Todoroki, his heterochromatic eyes following Bakugou around as he got up from the dining table and walked further away from there, his smartphone already in hand as he dialled a number in a rush. With how bad their luck was when on an outing together, it went without saying that they had to run into trouble that was directly related to the villain group that was attempting to headhunt one of them.

"This isn't the time for any I told you so's!" hissed Bakugou while dismissively waving his free hand around at Todoroki. His other hand was currently being used to keep his phone pressed against his ear while he waited for the phone call to connect. "Hey, Jeanist. I need you to check something for me real quick. …Yeah, it has to be now. … Oh, pipe down. I'm not talking to you during my vacation time because I want to, alright? Just hurry up and do as I'm asking you!"

"...Bakugou-kun's ability to order anyone around, our seniors included, is as impressive as always, ahaha," Uraraka laughed off, even though she was both amazed and shocked that her fellow pro hero could so easily start barking commands and instructions to someone who used to be in a mentor position with him in the past. No matter how well she got along with older, more experienced pro heroes, she would never be able to overcome the hierarchy of seniority that was hammered into their brains the moment they were born as Japanese citizens.

"Yeah, it's one of the things that makes him the perfect 'partner-in-crime'," said Todoroki, his expressionless demeanour softening into a small smile. He even chuckled a little bit when he saw Bakugou settling into a back-and-forth walking rhythm by the glass door leading to their spacious balcony as his conversation with Best Jeanist went on and on.

"R-Right…" Midoriya acknowledged with a certain hesitation, his body uncomfortably fidgeting in his seat. How exactly was he supposed to react to his usually completely expressionless best friend making such a radically wholesome facial expression while longingly gazing at this childhood friend? Midoriya literally had to bite down on the inside of his cheek to keep the urge to ram his head against the dining table at bay, to not speak of his intense desire to scream 'Just confess to Kacchan once and for all!' at the top of his lungs a second time. He obviously knew better than to dig his own grave, though, so he made sure to keep his mouth shut. As Midoriya tried to focus on anything aside from Todoroki's lovestruck semblance, he ended up noticing one other detail that almost made his jaw drop wide open yet again. "T-T-T-Todoroki-kun… Is… Is that a…?"

"Hm? Oh, yeah. We got wedding rings yesterday after our fake date," explained Todoroki when he turned back around to face his guests and noticed what Midoriya had been staring at while completely flabbergasted. He, too, looked at his own hand and at the golden wedding band wrapped around the base of his ring finger. "It was quite convenient that there was a jewellery store so close by to the

place where we had the last phase of yesterday's mission."

"Oh. It's very pretty, despite having such a simple design," commented Uraraka, mostly to give her boyfriend enough time to recover from this gigantic mental blow he had just suffered. Even she was extremely surprised that the fake couple had gone as far as to buy wedding rings to maintain the façade of their relationship. After all, wedding rings weren't particularly cheap, and they were also quite an adjustment for those who didn't usually wear accessories. "Will it be okay, though? I don't think rings, or any type of metal, for that matter, would be a good match for your Quirks and profession. Oh, wait. You can take the ring off while you're working, so I guess it's fine, after all?"

"No, we don't have to take them off, even while using our Quirks," explained Todoroki while tapping on the ring with the tip of his nail. "They were created through a jeweller's Quirk, making them basically indestructible. Actually, the only people capable of breaking them are us and the jeweller himself. But since I'm wearing the ring created from Katsuki and vice versa, I can use my Quirk as I please, without the risk of the ring melting or cracking under the fast temperature changes. That's why we can still keep them during our work hours. Plus, I know very well how my father is going to react to the rings once he finds out about them. But no matter how hard he tries, he won't be able to put a single scratch on it. Not that I plan to ever give him the chance to try to melt it with his flames… This ring isn't coming off my finger until we complete our unofficial mission."

"'W-We'…?" repeated Midoriya, too caught up by that initial bombastic reveal to register all of the other extremely stunning information that followed - including the use of his childhood friend's first name rather than surname. After all, unless Midoriya had misheard something or was creating one heck of a misunderstanding in his mind, it almost sounded like Todoroki had just said that…

"Yeah, we got two rings, one for each one of us," said Todoroki with a small nod of his head as he pointed at the busy-looking Bakugou with his thumb, in particular to the hand currently holding the smartphone

to his ear. “He’s wearing the ring that was created from me. They look the same, design-wise, aside from the colour. Mine is golden, and his is silver with streaks of red. Just like our hair, I guess. Well, the rings were created from exactly that, so that’s a given, now that I think about it.”

“Oh…” That was all Midoriya and Uraraka could muster at the moment, even as they exchanged a particularly conflicted glance with one another. Seriously, what was someone who could count one plus one even supposed to say to all of that? Neither of them knew how to react to Todoroki spouting all of that super romantic stuff with the calmness and straightforwardness of someone commenting on a commonplace aspect of a human being’s day-to-day life.

They also had absolutely no idea how to react to the fact that Bakugou had approved and consented to all of that. Unlike Todoroki, he did have a good semblance of common sense and societal awareness, even though he tended to give them the middle finger in favour of acting as he pleased. His ‘husband’ might be too dense and sheltered to realise that wearing indestructible rings created from each other’s locks of hair was *not* an ordinary way to go about getting matching wedding bands, but Bakugou definitely did understand the implication behind all of that.

I’m starting to wonder if all of this isn’t just a very elaborate prank Kacchan and Todoroki-kun are trying to pull on us, because WHAT THE HELL IS THIS!?, inwardly cringed Midoriya, grabbing his glass of iced tea with a trembling hand and then downing the whole thing in one go. *That’s the kind of wedding rings they decided to go with for their ‘fake marriage’? When they’re only doing all of this because of an unofficial mission, or so they claim? Seriously? Ahhh, why can’t they just confess to one another already and turn all of this into an official relationship? All of their problems could be solved in record time if only they would stop being so dense and emotionally constipated! Like, seriously, all they have to do is date for real! That’s it! Pretty simple and self-explanatory, right? Well, not for Kacchan and Todoroki-kun, it seems! Ahhh! This is driving me crazy! Can someone please slap some sense into them? Because if I do it, I won’t live long enough to see the conclusion of all of this insanity, and I DEFINITELY NEED TO SEE THIS ONE THROUGH TO THE END, OR*

ELSE I WON'T BE ABLE TO REST IN PEACE IN THE AFTERLIFE, AHHHHHHHHH!

"Why the hell do you look like you have just been forced to swallow a whole fuckin' lemon?" asked Bakugou, finally done with his phone call with Best Jeanist. He crossed his arms over his chest as he stood by the dining table, his face akin to that of a bloodthirsty demon as he glared at his childhood friend. "You got a problem with the iced tea I made, is that it?"

"N-N-N-No, not at all…!" yelped Midoriya, so scared of saying the wrong thing that he ended up stuttering like a scratched CD. He also shook his head so vigorously while reassuring his childhood friend that his panicky face was but a blur to those around him. "Y-Your iced tea is delicious! The b-best iced tea I've ever drunk, in fact! C-Could I please have seconds…!?"

"How about seconds of my front door, huh?" Bakugou suggested instead, his glaring crimson eyes tightening even further. His entire demeanour and stance were exuding the unmistakable message of 'I've had enough of you, kindly vacate the premises before I beat you up to a bloody pulp with the chair you are currently sitting at'.

"Y-Yup, that sounds lovely…!" squeaked Midoriya, promptly getting up from his seat like his butt had just been set on fire. He turned slightly around to better face Todoroki and offered a handful of hurried bows. "Thank you for having us, Todoroki-kun. And I'm sorry for bothering the two of you while you're, uh, b-busy with your unofficial mission."

"It's okay. You're always welcome at our apartment, whether for a regular visit or to discuss job-related matters," said Todoroki, obviously also extending those words to Uraraka.

“Speak for yourself… I’m only not pulling out the salt already ‘cuz I’d be damned if I wasted any of it exorcising and fumigating this wannabe stalker from my home…” grumbled Bakugou, keeping his glare on max intensity as Todoroki joined him in guiding their guests to the entrance. Both Midoriya and Uraraka simply awkwardly laughed at that while obediently ‘vacating the premises’.

“Once again, thank you for having us,” said Uraraka, offering a small bow to both hosts after having put her shoes back on. “I hope both of you enjoy the doughnuts we brought. I speak from personal experience when I say they are absolutely delish!”

“Yeah, yeah. Just beat it already,” sighed Bakugou with a roll of his eyes, shooing the visitors away with his hand.

“Oh, wait! What did Best Jeanist have to say about-”

The front door slammed shut right on Midoriya’s face before he could finish asking that question. Some light groaning could barely be heard coming from the other side, which Bakugou completely ignored as he dusted his hands off after a job well done.

“Alright, now that the pests are gone for good, it’s time I deal with you too,” declared Bakugou, turning the focus of his scowl from the closed door to his ‘spouse’. For the second day in a row, he was getting ready and loaded to lambast Todoroki until he tore him a new one. But before he could begin telling him off, Bakugou experienced possibly the most ridiculous event of his entire life - nay, of the entire existence of the human race.

Todoroki grabbed the sides of Bakugou’s pants and proceeded to pull them down without so much as saying a single word.

“What the fuck is wrong with you!?” hissed Bakugou, so scandalised by that daring act of… whatever that was even supposed to be, that he didn’t know whether he should pull his pants back up and beat the living daylights out of his perverted ‘husband’ or not even bother with that and just give him the beating of a lifetime before banning him from being within a 5-meter radius from him for the remainder of their time off.

“They’re gone now. You can go back to your previous get-up,” said Todoroki very calmly, his expressionless demeanour that of a man who had been enlightened through self-discovery. “Ah, and don’t forget to take off the jersey too.”

“You seriously need to be checked into the hospital… There’s something wrong with your brain…” declared Bakugou, his raging facial expression cooling down to one of half pity, half exasperation. As his main next of kin, it was now up to him to keep an eye out for his ‘spouse’s’ mental health and well-being, which also included alerting the proper authorities whenever he was about to officially lose it. And if Todoroki hadn’t already gone fully cray-cray in the bray-bray, he was very close to it. “Haa… Time to call for an ambulance…”

“I’m fine and so is my brain,” deadpanned Todoroki, snatching Bakugou’s smartphone away from his hand and storing it in his pants’ back pocket. “I just want to enjoy my petty payback in full. If you cooperate without kicking up a fuss, it will be over faster, I swear.”

“As if I’d ever cooperate with something as loony as this!” screeched Bakugou, already feeling his cheekbones heating up from the sheer ridiculousness of such a selfish statement. With his phone out of his reach, he decided to switch gears into pulling his pants back up so he wouldn’t accidentally trip and fall while trying to retrieve it. However, it seemed that his ‘husband’ was dead set on being the true egotistical menace of their household today and kept on trying to fully free his legs from those pants while also pulling on his jersey. “Hey! S-Stop with- Wait, don’t yank on them at the same- Argh, can you give it a rest already and listen to me!?”

Spoiler alert: Todoroki did, in fact, not give it a rest and listen to Bakugou until he got his petty payback in full.

-.-

Meanwhile…

“Hey, Izuku-kun…” Uraraka started as they leisurely walked side by side on the sidewalk, the towering apartment complex they had just left further back down the street. “I know this might sound a bit… No, scratch that. I know this might sound *really* crazy, but is it just me, or did it kind of seem like… Um…”

“No, it’s not just you…” sighed Midoriya, his weakened voice making him come across as very tired and totally sapped of vitality. Even without Uraraka saying it straightforwardly or even finishing that sentence, he totally knew what she was talking about and what kind of opinion she was seeking to share with him. “I’ve spent the past week wondering and agonising over exactly what you’re trying to say…”

“Ah… So that’s the reason behind this latest spike in head injuries, huh…” noted Urakara, nodding her head a couple of times as if she had just managed to find the answer to a long-standing mystery. “Does that mean that they are, um… actually married for real?”

“Let me put it this way…” said Midoriya, slowly taking a deep breath before he was forced to utter those cursed words out loud. “Are they married for real? Yes, they are, in fact, married for real in every single sense of the word. Do *they* know they are married for real? No, they definitely do not know they are married for real. Somehow…”

“Is something like that even possible…?” asked Uraraka, her facial expression becoming not only more serious but also slightly concerned. It probably had taken her boyfriend quite a lot of courage to say something like that out loud, which made her realise the severity of the situation, even though it also sounded quite nonsensical and ludicrous. Todoroki’s denseness aside, he and Bakugou were very smart young men, so the thought of them not realising they were through and through married despite calling it just a ‘temporary marriage of convenience’ was simply…

“It shouldn’t be, but apparently it is…” sighed Midoriya, wanting nothing more than to either burst into tears out of sheer exasperation or to rush back into that apartment and try to snap his two friends out of whatever dense spell they had fallen victim to. “I don’t know how or why, but I think they somehow convinced themselves that all that they are doing is for the sake of their unofficial mission. Kissing in public without any issue? It’s because of their mission. Being all touchy-feely and flirty with one another? Yup, it’s because of the mission. Getting wedding rings that basically scream ‘I’ve married the love of my life, and not even death, insane in-laws or cult members may do us apart’? You guessed it: it’s just part of their mission. Ahhh, we are so done for… If this is how Kacchan and Todoroki-kun choose to go about their feelings for one another, we and the entire world are beyond doomed…”

“There, there. It’s gonna be okay, Izuku-kun,” reassured Uraraka, gently patting and rubbing his back in hopes of providing him with some comfort and solace. “We all know that both Todoroki-kun and Bakugou-kun have their, err, struggles with their emotional intelligence. But that has never held them back from getting along really well with each other, right? In fact, now that I think about it, they’ve always been very complementary to one another in that regard.”

“Huh? How?” asked Midoriya, his jaw ready to drop to the floor yet again, thanks to Uraraka’s unexpected remark. He lifted his head from the hands where he had buried his face and stared completely flabbergasted at his girlfriend, waiting eagerly for a proper follow-up and a more detailed explanation.

“Oh, you know. Unlike most people, Bakugou-kun has no issues with being super direct with everyone about everything, which at times makes him come across as super disrespectful and a know-it-all. But since Todoroki-kun struggles with reading between the lines, that straightforwardness probably comes in handy quite a lot,” said Uraraka, going for the most obvious pointers off the top of her head. “Todoroki-kun is also a really calm person and takes things in stride rather than getting offended by them, which means that Bakugou-kun’s offensive but not all that serious comments and sarcasm have next to no effect on him. They might bicker quite a lot with each other, and I can see why that makes you and everyone else so nervous about their relationship, but to be honest, I don’t think they see that as that big of a deal, if one at all. In fact, I think they both like having that sort of challenge in their lives, rather than one more person who instantly crumbles under their pressure.”

“I can sort of see what you’re trying to get at, but still…” acknowledged Midoriya, though with a fair bit of hesitation. “Even if they do get along well at the end of the day, that doesn’t solve the biggest problem in this whole thing: their inability to tell that they are head over heels in love with each other. That and the possible chaos that might ensue from this half-baked marriage they are creating without even being fully aware of it is what really worries me…”

“I think you’re being too pessimistic and overthinking too much, Izuku-kun,” chuckled Uraraka, once again comforting her boyfriend by patting his shoulder. “Aside from the scandals they had planned and accounted for right from the start, have they been creating any problems for themselves or others?”

“Well… No, but…” admitted Midoriya with a small voice, almost as if he were a little kid being gently chided by his mother.

“There you have it, then,” said Uraraka, finishing that off with a strong slap to Midoriya’s back and a happy, satisfied smile that could have illuminated the darkest of rooms. “Leave them alone in their own

antics, and they'll figure something out at their own pace. Besides, it's not like we can really butt in too much, can we? They need to do that themselves, without any external influence that might affect their ultimate decision."

"On that, I fully agree with you," sighed Midoriya, feeling a bit calmer and less worried now that he had both vented his worries while receiving a strong dose of reassurance. "If we were to interfere with it too much, we'd only be complicating things ever further. Watching from a distance and hoping for the best while throwing in the occasional hint and advice is probably the only thing we can do… And even that might be a stretch, given how my latest conversations with Todoroki-kun have gone…"

"The denseness is that bad, huh?" laughed Uraraka, easily guessing what sort of insane exchanges Midoriya and Todoroki had been having just by the exasperated look on her boyfriend's face.

"It's so bad, I honestly feel like crying a little bit," Midoriya nearly sobbed, his shoulders dropping despondently at the weight of his confession. "Todoroki-kun has been switching back and forth between being frustratingly dense about very obvious things and being weirdly cognisant about certain aspects of his relationship with Kacchan and his overall opinion on him. It's honestly a mystery how he has gone all these years without ever realising he's in love with Kacchan…"

"To be fair, we're also only noticing all of this after they have literally gotten married, so can we really blame him there?" Uraraka pointed out while taking the role of devil's advocate on this one.

"T-True…" admitted Midoriya, reluctantly as it might have been. "I think I know both Kacchan and Todoroki-kun pretty well, but even I didn't see this one coming…"

“See?” chuckled Uraraka, no pun actually intended with her response. “I am curious about how long it will take them to figure it out, though. Denseness aside, they are both really smart. They might think they are doing all of this for the sake of their mission at the moment, but there’s a limit to everything, right? I wonder how far they’ll have to push it until they start going, ‘hold on, there’s no way I’d do any of this because of an unofficial mission, what is really going on here?’ Maybe they are even already getting to that point, but are still in the process of, you know, processing all of it, so to speak.”

“I can’t speak for Todoroki-kun in that regard, but I doubt Kacchan will fall for the ‘being married is part of the mission, so behaving like a married couple all the time, both in public and private, is a-okay’ mind trick for too long,” noted Midoriya, once again in agreement with Uraraka’s thoughtful conclusion. “Part of me can’t even believe he fell for it to begin with… Some serious cognitive dissonance must have been going on in his brain for that to have happened. Then again, this is Kacchan we’re talking about here… That might have actually been the only way for him to deal with such a ridiculous situation without him losing it instantly…”

“Hmm… I cast my vote on Todoroki-kun,” said Uraraka after briefly thinking about it. “Unlike Bakugou-kun, he isn’t plagued by the tsundere curse. Plus, with the way he acts around and towards him already, he might be reeeeeeeally close to figuring it out. I mean, there’s no other plausible explanation as to why he’d go out of his way to cover *your* eyes just because Bakugou-kun waltzed in so lightly dressed, right? Me thinks someone felt a tiny, little bit jealous over the thought of another man seeing his hubby looking like that~”

“Yeah, that whole thing was… *something*, to put it nicely,” sighed Midoriya, partially relieved that he had come out of that incident unscathed. Adding that to the fact that he couldn’t quite tell which bedroom belonged to whom, seeing as Bakugou had been going in and out of two different rooms that whole time, Midoriya was certainly getting very mixed signals from their cohabitation arrangement. “I just hope that when the realisation hits them, they don’t end up misunderstanding it or dismissing it as just some side effects of their fake marriage. They already have enough problems on their hands as

it is; they don't need to add more drama to the mix… But that might be asking for too much, knowing them… Ugh, now I'm getting worried about them all over again…!"

"Ahahaha! Let's all do our best to support and root for them from a safe distance, alright?" said Uraraka, unable to not laugh a little bit at her worrywart boyfriend. She also included some additional motivation to make sure he wouldn't inadvertently revert to his bad habit of trying to play the hero in every perceived issue that he bumped into, even when it had nothing to do with him. "That's the only way you can keep Bakugou-kun's explosions to a bare minimum and be alive for long enough to attend any real wedding they might host in the future."

"I-I'll try my best, yeah…" acknowledged Midoriya very sheepishly, knowing how true his girlfriend's words rang.

Chapter 60

“I’m sorry for being today’s selfish one…” sighed Todoroki, offering a small bow with just his head at his sulking ‘husband’.

“It’s a bit too late for that now…” grumbled Bakugou, hunkering down on the sofa with his knees up to his chest.

The end result of their latest silly spat was as follows…

Todoroki had been violently scratched on his face and exposed arms, and got thrown around quite a lot throughout the whole ordeal. Bakugou was back to wearing a t-shirt and underwear only, and sulking big time for it. Both had lost, but also won.

“I’m glad you can already walk and move like normal, though,” said Todoroki as he straightened his head and sitting position right next to Bakugou on the sofa. “Since you can beat me up without any issues, it must mean that the heat treatment I applied to your back while we were taking a bath worked as intended. We should keep that up from now on.”

“Like hell it did… I told you right from the start that I was more than capable of beating you to a pulp…” pointed out Bakugou, kindly reminding his forgetful ‘husband’ of one of the many threats he had voiced out earlier that morning. That also helped him refresh his memory and make him remember a certain something that Todoroki had said around that same time. He lifted his chin from his knees and angrily turned his head in his ‘husband’s’ direction. “Wait, didn’t you say I could get dressed as I pleased once I was able to walk on my own to my bedroom?”

“By the way, what did Best Jeanist say during your phone call?” asked

Todoroki, completely ignoring that previous question in favour of his own. He might be a bit slow on the uptake at times, but he wasn't stupid. Todoroki knew almost right away when he was screwed.

"Don't pretend you didn't hear me, and don't try to change the topic either!" hissed Bakugou, accusingly pointing his index finger at Todoroki. Despite that, he still ended up spitting out a very displeased reply. "He said he was going to look into it and report back to me once he had a concrete answer!"

"Which means he also thinks there's a possibility of me having been right this whole time," acknowledged Todoroki with an expressionless nod of his head. Now he felt twice as regretful that he and Bakugou had been separated while that villain incident was unfolding, and were only reunited at the end of it. Ultimately, the ensuing fight and arrests were performed without any further issues, and the danger level never went above a big inconvenience as far as Bakugou was concerned. But given the circumstances, Todoroki couldn't help but think that he should try a little bit harder to stick like glue to Bakugou when they were out and about together. *With the 'luck' we have always had, going anywhere just the two of us is as good as asking for trouble to follow. I should assume from the get-go that any incident that happens around us from now on is linked to the villain cult group, one way or another.*

"It's just a theory for now. Don't celebrate a victory before there's any confirmation of it," scoffed Bakugou, still having his doubts and suspicions about that so-called theory, despite having been the one who rushed to call Best Jeanist the moment it went from 'no way' to 'could it be?' in his brain. It was nothing more than a nagging feeling for the time being, and he didn't have enough evidence to support a radical change of plans.

On the other hand, he did have very good instincts and an even better aptitude for reading other people. Bakugou might have only met a handful of cult members up until now, but those few chance meetings had been more than enough for him to get a good read on how their delusional minds worked. He'd rather investigate a small suspicion

and come out of it empty-handed than risk letting a huge lead escape and have it blow up in his face later down the line.

“Well, whether I’m right or wrong, I hope this still helps with your investigation on the villain cult group and its members,” Todoroki remarked to defuse any incoming bickering. He wasn’t the kind of man who needed to be right all the time, unlike a certain explosive blonde. If he was right, that was fine. If he turned out to be wrong, that was fine too. All he wanted was for Bakugou to be safe and far away from the clutches of those insane cult members and any hired helpers they might or might not get in contact with. “We’ve been doing really well with my side of our deal lately. It’s only fair we focus on your side for a bit, too.”

“Don’t need it. As far as I’m concerned, you’re only here as a convenient scandal that I can use at my beck and call. I don’t want your help for anything else,” grumbled Bakugou, his facial expression creasing and souring yet again at the simple thought of being helped by Todoroki - even though he had received quite a lot of it that morning alone (or so was his brain refusing to acknowledge for the sake of his pride). “You, on the other hand, still need to work on quite a lot of things to be able to please your daddy dearest. Like stopping being such a god damned pervert all the damn time and focusing on learning those solo living skills you need to succeed!”

“I did the grocery shopping without any problems this time, didn’t I?” pointed out Todoroki, a bit saddened by the fact that he was being told off yet again, even though he had accomplished his errand run just fine. He had nothing to say about his more perverted side, though. Denying what he himself acknowledged would be a waste of time and kindling for yet another spat.

“Congrats on being able to do something even an elementary school brat could!” scoffed Bakugou with a fed-up roll of his eyes. “Also, I haven’t checked what you bought yet, so don’t think you’re in the clear already. Gimme the receipt.”

“Ah… The receipt?” asked Todoroki, his entire body freezing on the spot. His heart might or might not have stopped for half a second, too. He already knew that Bakugou would want to inspect the groceries he had purchased, as the relentless micromanager that he was, but going as far as to check the receipt… Todoroki was definitely in trouble now. “Um… I don’t think I brought the receipt home with me? I frequently forget them at the store…”

“Bullshit. Hand it over,” said Bakugou, motioning his open hand to Todoroki to urge him to give it to him. “I wasn’t born yesterday, you doofus. You think you can deceive me by moving items around and hiding them from me beforehand? The fact that you’re already deploying your crappy lying skills is also as good as you admitting to being in the wrong. Either you fucked up the shopping list I gave you, or you bought the stuff that I explicitly told you not to. And since you’re oh so proud of having done a good job, I bet it’s the latter. Am I right or am I right?”

“.....”

“Seriously, what was I thinking when I agreed to get ‘married’ to you?” groaned Bakugou, the silence having come across louder than anything Todoroki could have said in his own defence. It was too late to regret their deal now, but he could still bitch and moan about it after the fact whenever stuff like this happened.

“...Is it really that bad to be prepared for all and any eventuality?” asked Todoroki, still unable to understand why Bakugou insisted on kicking up a fuss about something like this. “I don’t think it’s that unreasonable to have a good supply of condoms at home, given that we are adults *and* having sex.”

“It’s bad only because it makes you think you have a shot at sleeping with me…” grumbled Bakugou, withdrawing his hand so he could cross his arms over his chest as he changed his sitting position into a cross-legged one.

“I don’t think, I know,” deadpanned Todoroki, saying out loud the thought that had immediately crossed his mind, perhaps against his better judgment.

“You better stay on your guard from now on, cuz the next time I grab my kitchen knife, I’m castrating you on the spot,” growled Bakugou, viciously glaring sideways at his ‘husband’. He didn’t deny that ballsy statement, though. In his own tsundere way, he was making peace with the fact that hooking up with Todoroki again was a matter of when, not if.

“That… would be a bit inconvenient,” said Todoroki, a small frown surfacing on his face. Calling losing his male reproductive organs ‘a bit inconvenient’ was possibly the understatement of the year, but sweating over the little details just wasn’t his thing. “I know you’d do a great job at it, since your knife skills are so good. But the lack of any sort of anesthesia is quite worrying…”

“The only worrying thing here is your inability to read between the lines and understand sarcasm…” sighed Bakugou, yet again reevaluating his previous life choices. He definitely had taken a wrong turn somewhere down the line if this was the present where he ended up. But, again, there was no use crying over spilt milk, and there was also no putting it back inside the milk carton. Bakugou would have to work with what he had, even if it meant having to live together with this brainless entity that he now called his ‘husband’.

“Oh. So you’re not going to castrate me after all?” asked Todoroki, expressionlessly perking up at that. It was indeed a huge relief that Bakugou had only been complaining without intending to act on any of his threats, rather than planning to turn the knife towards him the moment he latched on to Bakugou’s body, as he had been lately whenever they were in the kitchen cooking their meals. Of course, there was always the high likelihood of Bakugou being all bark and no bite with his threats, as it usually happened, but Todoroki preferred to be cautiously optimistic rather than reactionary while in mortal

combat…

"I just might, if that saves us from you ever reproducing and adding more dense little brats into this world," said Bakugou, exaggerating a flat, emotionless tone so it would be painfully obvious, no matter how dense the listener was, that he was yet again being sarcastic here. However, with the way Todoroki was looking at him, he could already tell that he had failed miserably at it. "No, I'm not going to castrate you, you idiot. I have better things to do with my time and knives. But keep rubbing me the wrong way, or thinking you can sexually harass me all day long just because you're in the mood to be a selfish prick with the self-control of a fuckin' monkey, and I will make sure the rest of our marriage of convenience is so traumatising to you, you will wish you had married the 'ideal bride' Endeavor would have picked for you. And no, I am *not* being sarcastic right now."

"Duly noted," acknowledged Todoroki with a single nod of his head. He hated to see it coming to an end, but it seemed like he had no choice in the matter any longer. Todoroki gave one last long glance at Bakugou and his lovely appearance, committing every little detail to memory in his special Bakugou Katsuki-only treasure trove. Then he offered a small bow to him with his head while sighing. "Thanks for going along with my petty payback. You can go change now, if you want to."

"Fuckin' finally…!" groaned Bakugou, immediately jumping out of the sofa, even though the landing on the floor was slightly more unstable than intended. He didn't waste any time rushing back to his bedroom, even starting to take off Todoroki's t-shirt halfway there.

I know he's not doing it on purpose, but he really should be more careful about flashing others, inwardly deadpanned Todoroki after catching a good glimpse of Bakugou's bare back, his slender waist that ended in a soft, round ass, and his long, muscled legs. It made him feel vindicated over having covered Midoriya's eyes on reflex, even though he felt a bit embarrassed about it after the fact. Uraraka had the decency to turn around, being a woman in a committed relationship, but with all three of them being men and Bakugou technically not being fully

naked or in a full-on provocative get-up, Todoroki had gone into autopilot and protectively covered up his exposed ‘husband’ - even if using some more indirect means to do so. *Still, that was pretty weird. Midoriya has known Katsuki since they were kids, and they’ve seen each other with far fewer clothes before. So why did I react like this now?*

That question was another mystery that was to be added to Todoroki’s growing list of uncertainties revolving around Bakugou. He had quite a lot of thinking to do during an occasion where time came across as extremely limited and, simultaneously, abundant enough that he felt he didn’t need to rush anything. However, with the way new things kept getting added to that ‘list’, perhaps Todoroki would be better off if he started paying it some more attention.

Even if this mission was, for all intents and purposes, an unofficial one that wasn’t directly connected to his pro hero career, Todoroki was taking it very seriously. His future and his relationship with his father were on the line, for his side of the deal, and both Bakugou’s and a lot of innocent people’s lives were at risk if something wasn’t done about the villain cult group, for the other half. That obviously meant that Todoroki needed to give both of those goals his utmost best, even if time wasn’t a constraint they needed to worry about at the moment.

Since having a good partnership with Bakugou was an essential cornerstone of their mission, it went without saying that Todoroki *had* to work through all of these questions and doubts at some point, or they might start affecting their short- and long-term goals. He actually felt that was already starting to happen, as he was getting more and more ambivalent about certain aspects of the conclusion stage of their mission.

Yeah, I should give all of this some good thought, instead of being half-assed about it, to quote Katsuki, concluded Todoroki in the back of his mind, nodding his head outwardly too. Wasn’t being more intentional about his personal life another important aspect of learning how to live well all on his own? In that case, Todoroki could start by doing exactly that on this matter, which he found to be extremely important and something he could not risk messing up by reverting to bad

habits.

He should also try to be more mindful of Bakugou's boundaries, instead of constantly testing them and seeing how much he can get away with. Just because Bakugou turned out to be surprisingly lenient of his selfish (and occasionally unreasonable) antics, it did not mean that Todoroki could abuse the privilege he had been given. Perhaps taking a step or two back and giving Bakugou the breathing room needed to be the king of the house to his heart's content was in order. It wasn't as if Todoroki had any issues with Bakugou ordering him around (so long as it was done within reason). He often even let him run wild despite other people's warnings, as that was the easiest way to deal with a myriad of situations.

Maybe I'll just let him act as spoiled as he wants for the rest of the day, Todoroki thought to his own buttons. That would balance out their current ratio, right? Fairness was a feature of their deal that Bakugou had been demanding right from the start, after all. With Todoroki taking a page or two out of Bakugou's egocentric book, it was now time to reverse the roles back to how they originally were.

As Todoroki was debating himself over all the different ways he could level the field, so to speak, Bakugou came out of his bedroom, this time fully dressed in his own clothes. Overall, there wasn't that big of a difference between what he looked like right now and how he looked while wearing half Todoroki's clothes, half his own. Bakugou getting a complete makeover was more about pride than comfort.

"We haven't talked about this yet, but what should we do today?" asked Todoroki, the slight sound of movement urging him to turn and look in the direction of the bedrooms. That made it easier for his face to be yet again slapped by a few layers of fabric. Todoroki deadpanned while pulling his t-shirt away from his head. "Are your clothes throwing tantrums over now?"

"Just be glad I didn't shove the underwear down your throat too,"

scoffed Bakugou as he walked around the sofa and sat back down on the same spot as before. In his hands, he had what Todoroki could presume to be a first-aid box. “Come here. I’m tired of looking at that ugly mug of yours.”

“Oh. Okay,” said Todoroki, obediently doing as told and scooching closer to his ‘husband’. He silently watched as Bakugou opened the storage box and started gathering a few medical supplies, specifically some cotton pads and rubbing alcohol. “These are just some light scratches. You don’t need to- Ouch…!”

“Yeah, I know. But watching you wince is fun, so why not?” Bakugou pointed out with a small shrug, already in the process of dabbing the cotton pad against one of the scratches on Todoroki’s cheek. The sudden coldness and the slight stinging pain made his ‘husband’ flinch a little bit, which Bakugou couldn’t help but gleefully snicker at.

“Your personality truly is a bad match to the profession you picked,” deadpanned Todoroki, inwardly sighing at that evil-coded response. It was so very much like Bakugou to take some sadistic enjoyment in watching other people grimace in pain at the injuries he had personally caused. However, Todoroki had to give him some credit where credit was due. Bakugou was actually being very careful as he disinfected each scratch, methodically going through them one by one rather than rushing through the whole process. In his own hot-and-cold, so-not-honest way, Bakugou was most likely repaying him for what he had done during their bathtime. It was this gentler side that made it impossible for Todoroki to complain too much about the mean act his ‘husband’ put on just for the sake of coming across as the villain.

“Heh, you know it,” declared Bakugou, proudly smirking at Todoroki while acknowledging that pointed comment. It wasn’t meant as a compliment, not even by a long shot, but for him, it was one of the utmost sources of his pride and joy. “Now pipe down. The only things allowed to come out of your mouth are cries and sobs.”

So he says while being extra careful not to hurt me, chuckled Todoroki in the back of his mind. His unmovable, expressionless demeanour truly came in handy at times like this, as he could just quietly stare at Bakugou's serious face for finding the whole exchange to be so adorable and wholesome without ever being called out on it. His true thoughts would never translate into his facial expression, no matter how touched he genuinely felt.

Once Bakugou was done with his face, he moved on to the small scratches on his arms. At first, Todoroki thought he'd dust his hands off of that task the moment his face was done and leave the rest up to him, but surprisingly, Bakugou kept going without any complaints. Todoroki also didn't have any of his own, as he appreciated the pampering, even if the rubbing alcohol stung a fair bit. His earlier question of what their plans for the day should be had been left unanswered, but this was a good way to spend their time, in his opinion. Bakugou was doing as he pleased, and Todoroki was being rewarded by going along with it.

It's a bit of a pity he didn't scratch me more while I was taking his pants off, admitted Todoroki to his own buttons as Bakugou was applying the rubbing alcohol to the last scratch on his left arm. Once that was done, the pampering… um, no, the first-aid treatment would be over too, which felt very regretful for him. He didn't want the tender physical contact to end. So much so that the crazy thought of wishing he had gotten hurt more severely was crossing his mind, just so he could continue being touched by Bakugou for a little while longer. *Ah. That's a bit of a dangerous thought, too. I need to change course to something more-*

Every single one of Todoroki's thoughts suddenly came to a halt. His entire body, too, froze in place, including his breathing. All because Bakugou had, out of nowhere, grabbed the hem of his t-shirt and was now pulling it up without a care in the world.

Chaos was the best way to describe what Todoroki was experiencing at the moment. The mixed signals he was getting would leave anyone confused, whether they were described as dense by others or not. Was

this some sort of invitation? Was Bakugou up to his seductive antics again? Was he doing it on purpose to tease him, like when they were taking a bath? Or was he once again picking up his declaration of 'I'm going to seduce the hell out of you' after he was interrupted by Todoroki last night?

All of those questions were swirling around inside of Todoroki's brain within the second or so that it took him to glance up and down at the hand pulling on his clothes and Bakugou's calm demeanour.

"What?" asked Bakugou, an eyebrow slightly arched due to the questioning stare he was receiving from his 'husband'. "You don't want me to finish treating the rest of your injuries? The human mouth is a fuckin' disgusting place, even if you take good care of it. You do not want to get a nasty infection from being bitten and leaving it untreated for too long, especially if the skin is broken."

"Oh. So that's what this is," said Todoroki, unconsciously breathing out a sigh of relief. It was a good thing he waited to see what was going on rather than jumping straight to very hasty conclusions. He, too, grabbed the hem of his t-shirt and smoothly took it off before he turned his body slightly to the side to give Bakugou better access to not only the bitten areas, but also the scratches on his back. "I was wondering whether you were coming on to me or not. Good thing I didn't fall for your unintentional seduction this time."

"Will I have to start announcing out loud that I am *not* trying to seduce you every single time I'm doing something around you!?" hissed Bakugou, slapping a new cotton pad with rubbing alcohol right over the bite mark on Todoroki's shoulder and then pressing down hard on it with his fingers.

"Ouch, ouch… Yeah, a verbal warning would come in handy, actually," acknowledged Todoroki, missing the sarcastic tone of Bakugou's rhetorical question as per usual. That got Bakugou pushing down the cotton pad on the bite mark even harder, while also

applying pressure on a particularly sensitive spot on the human shoulder area. The pain delivered the message that Bakugou was trying to send him better than words ever could. “Okay, no verbal warnings. But how else am I supposed to tell which one is which?”

“You have a brain! Figure it out on your own!” Bakugou demanded, not all that kindly dabbing the cotton pad on that bite mark before moving on to the other one right next to it. “You got it right this time, didn’t you? Just use the same methodology from now on!”

“What if it was a fluke?” asked Todoroki, split between wanting to cooperate with his ‘husband’s’ instruction and doubting his skills in reading his moody, unpredictable ‘spouse’s’ intentions. “You know I’m not very good with social cues and knowing what other people are indirectly trying to tell me. It’s the exact reason you call me ‘dense’ all the time.”

“Good luck surviving in Japan, then,” sighed Bakugou while rolling his eyes. Japanese people were seen as kind and friendly by the world at large, but that cordiality was, more often than not, surface-level and used to avoid rocking the boat too much in public. Bakugou wasn’t all that fond of that learned behaviour, an aversion that made him develop a keen nose when it came to two-faced people. He could spot them after a single glance, and he didn’t hesitate to call them out on it if they tried to get too friendly or close to him. “Most of the people around here will smile right on your face while wanting to end that interaction with you as soon as possible. And never mind their even more indirect passive-aggressive comments. Dense as you are, you will never know someone just literally told you to fuck off straight to your face. At least I say it as it is, sarcasm or not. But then we get those delusional morons who go on and on about how we’re all so community-minded and always there to help each other out. Yeah, so long as you are a carbon copy of their ‘ideal’. The moment you show even the slightest of signs of being different, they try to hammer you down to their level. If they can’t do that, they set you aside and ostracise you. Either you’re in the club, or you’re an ‘other’. Argh, just thinking about that pisses me off. I can’t stand those sorts of people. And I also can’t stand those losers who kowtow to that BS cuz of ‘that’s just the way things are’ and ‘when in Rome do as the Romans

do'. Loads of people are gonna learn the hard way how much that crap sucks the moment their 'club card' gets rescinded, and they are kicked down to the level of 'other', that I can assure you."

"Is that something that bothers you?" asked Todoroki when he found a small lull in Bakugou's angry rant. Since he had been passively-aggressively disinfecting the bite marks and scratches on his back all the while, it was very obvious the moment Bakugou's hand halted at that question. Todoroki had probably just unintentionally touched on a sore spot that he should not have. However, he wasn't skilled enough at social interactions to know how to put the genie back in the bottle at such a late stage.

"...It doesn't bother me, it annoys me," grumbled Bakugou after a while, switching from the cotton pads and rubbing alcohol to the antibacterial cream he usually used on his own injuries to give the healing process a boost. "In a world where pretty much everyone has Quirks, it's an antiquated system that causes a crapton of friction with nearly no benefits. So what if everyone in a certain place isn't the same flavour of good, old boring? There's hardly any difference between getting served by someone with a fake smile plastered on their face or someone who is just going about their day feeling whatever it is they are feeling at that moment, good or bad. You get the same cup of coffee in either case. If someone is doing their job well, does it even matter if they look this way, speak that way, or use a method no one else around them uses? But no, they force everyone to follow the same rules and guidelines, no breathing room for flexibility allowed, even if it comes at the cost of loss of productivity or the burnout of perfectly good workers. If there's a better way to do something, why can't things just be done that way instead of the 'same old way'?"

"You got told off by the HPS Commission again, didn't you?" deadpanned Todoroki, starting to get the feeling that there was more to this impromptu rant than he had initially thought. And from Bakugou's reaction, it seemed he had hit the jackpot this time.

"Shut up! It's not my fault that I don't fall within their cookie-cutter

demands for pro heroes!" hissed Bakugou, putting on the cream on Todoroki's back scratches a bit more aggressively for that one. "You say one measly cuss word in front of journalists, and you get sent a letter as a warning. People complain you look a bit too menacing for their liking while you're out and about on your rounds, and you get told to smile some more. A child cries because they saw me knock a villain out cold while detaining them, and then I end up getting scolded for promoting violence. Well, excuse me for not being a billboard sign model for their fake, holier-than-thou attitudes while saving the fuckin' day! Never mind that I currently have the highest arrest rates by a long shot in the whole country! I'm still the bad guy for not smiling enough, apparently!"

Yeah, I can see him being told off by the HPS Commission for all of that, noted Todoroki in the back of his mind, sympathizing quite a bit with Bakugou on his hardships as a public figure.

Todoroki hardly had any issues with the Hero Public Safety Commission or with his public image as a pro hero, but that didn't mean that he was part of the 'in-group' in the pro hero world. In a way, he was as much of an 'other' as Bakugou saw himself to be. Just like his 'spouse', Todoroki wasn't the kind of pro hero that went about his day smiling and waving at everyone he passed by, or randomly talking with those whom he encountered every single time he did his usual security round routes. He was certainly not as abrasive as Bakugou was, but he also wasn't one to waste time currying favour with the public and other more experienced pro heroes, all of which set them apart compared to their more sociable and friendly peers or those who partook in publicity stunts or partnerships with companies as part of their hero activities.

His lack of difficulties dealing with the HPS Commission, though, mainly came from the fact that he was an 'other' who was more palatable and tolerable due to some added benefits that his 'husband' did not have in his arsenal. For example, a good chunk of his popularity as a pro hero came from the fact that he was so physically attractive to half of the population. It had nothing to do with his good performance as a pro hero or how his presence contributed to the safety of the country in general. He was hot, so people liked him, in

lieu of what usually happened with idols and actors. His ‘pedigree’ as the son of a former No. 1 pro hero was another advantage he had compared to most of his coworkers. It was a bit of a double-edged sword, as he and all of his achievements were constantly being compared to his father’s, but it did make it harder for others to criticise him, since it could also be interpreted as them criticising Endeavor and how he had mentored pro hero Shouto.

That usually led others to either excuse or minimise Todoroki’s faults as an individual and weaknesses as a pro hero. And when he was reprimanded for something he had done wrong or for not fully adhering to the strict guidelines implemented by the HPS Commission, he had the kind of personality that allowed him to keep his mouth shut and listen, rather than openly defy the scolding as it was unfolding and talk back. Bakugou was inherently unable to pull that off. He had long been warned about it, both by their teachers at UA and the instructors who participated in the remedial course they had been made to attend during their first year in high school, but old habits seemed to be very hard to break in someone as stubborn and prideful as Bakugou was.

Personally, Todoroki didn’t see the issue with any of that. It was simply different strokes for different folks in his eyes. If someone wanted to follow the ‘same old ways’, they should be allowed to do so. But if someone came up with a different system that worked as well as, or maybe even better than, the current one, they should also have the liberty to follow through with it. He also believed that pro heroes should be allowed to express themselves more freely, only being bound by the same laws that applied to everyone else. Cussing in front of cameras… was definitely a bad idea, but being told to change one’s mannerisms due to other people’s personal preferences and perceptions was beyond ridiculous and too much of an overreach.

The HPS Commission had caught a lot of heat in the past due to their lacking vetting process when it came to pro heroes and sidekicks, a stain in their reputation that was still being worked on by former pro hero Hawks as its current president. New rules and guidelines were implemented, and the vetting process for who was allowed to become a pro hero and sidekick was now a whole lot stricter and more

cautious. However, the pendulum might have swung a bit too hard in the opposite direction, and the rules aimed at improving the quality of the pro heroes currently serving the country were now becoming akin to a tightening noose around some necks.

Bakugou seemed to be particularly affected by it, the way he was fussing and ranting about it.

As for Bakugou's remarks on the culture and his distaste for certain aspects of it… Todoroki couldn't be 100% sure of it, of course, but he felt they were partially being made out of guilt. It might not have been done in the same manner, but Bakugou had made some very exclusionary statements in the past, in particular to those without Quirks. His views on that had obviously changed and he had even taken some solid steps to make amends with those who he had hurt with that sort of bullying behaviour, but the bitter aftertaste it had left in his conscience was probably present even now. Perhaps that regret had made him more keenly aware of how those little societal behaviours so many people were raised to follow affected those who were unable to, for one reason or another.

Katsuki really has matured quite a lot compared to when we were students, chuckled Todoroki in the back of his mind. There was no reason for him to feel so strongly about it, as he was never one of Bakugou's 'targets', but he did feel very proud of the growth his former classmate had gone through since then. *It's a pity so many people can't, or refuse to, see how good of a person he actually is, even if he does come across as a tyrannical hardass most of the time.*

"Hm? Wait, is that also related to what that guy from the villain cult group that you arrested last week was talking about?" asked Todoroki when a certain conversation he had overheard a while ago suddenly came to mind, purely from the fact they were going over this topic. "Didn't he say something along the lines of the perception people have of you being the reason why you can't improve your ranking in the Hero Billboard?"

“Tsk… You still remember that?” grumbled Bakugou after softly clicking his tongue in annoyance. Since he had finished applying the antibacterial cream on all of Todoroki’s shoulder and back injuries, he cleaned his hands with a wet wipe and started setting aside everything that was to go to the trash while putting the unused cotton pads, rubbing alcohol, and antibacterial cream back inside the first-aid box. “I’m done dressing your injuries, so you can go back to doing whatever it is you do on your days off.”

“It is, isn’t it?” Todoroki reiterated, not allowing Bakugou to just change the topic and avoid the remainder of their conversation. He turned back around to face his ‘husband’ properly and keep their discussion going as he closely observed him and his frowning demeanour. “Why do they seem to be so familiar with the inner workings of hero rankings and how they are decided?”

“It doesn’t take a genius to figure that out, alright?” groaned Bakugou while rolling his eyes as far back as they could go. For the millionth time, he inwardly cursed Todoroki’s inability to read the room. “In its current format, the Hero Billboard is nothing more than a glorified popularity contest. Some pro heroes have an advantage over the others, like being obnoxiously friendly or having the luck of being born looking like a dreamboat. Everyone else has to put in the actual work to climb the ranks. But take a good look around you. Things are peaceful as fuck right now. The opportunities to be in the limelight thanks to a big villain fight or a huge incident are dwindling every year that goes by. So yeah, my access to the top rankings in the Hero Billboard has been cut off ages ago. I know that, those lunatics know that, and I bet the HPS Commission is also fully aware of that. Happy now?”

“That’s not true,” said Todoroki right away, extremely surprised to hear Bakugou being so pessimistic rather than his usual confident, haughty self. “You’re really good at what you do, and everyone within the pro hero world praises your work ethic all the time. There’s more-”

“Oh, spare me the platitudes and groundless reassurances,” Bakugou

cut off, his frown deepening. Despite the negative connotation of his words, he still looked particularly committed and serious, rather than resigned or cynical. This was the opinion of someone who had accepted reality, while still actively working against it. “I’ve been aware of this roadblock since before we graduated from UA. I still decided to go forward with my plans to become a pro hero. No, to become *the* No. 1 pro hero. I couldn’t care less about popularity or being liked by others. Strength and results are all that matter to me. I am the strongest pro hero currently working in this god-damned country, and everyone that counts knows it. I don’t give a fuck if that translates well into the Hero Billboard or any of those silly metrics they use to rank pro heroes. The moment there’s a real issue around here, big or small, I’m the first person they call to go solve it, even if I have to contort myself to follow their stupid little rules and guidelines. And *that* is the true pro hero ranking. Not the one they air live on TV as a publicity stunt.”

Now that sounded more like Bakugou Katsuki, Todoroki couldn’t help but think.

Todoroki was very well aware of what the frustration of being unable to reach the number one spot could do to a person. He never experienced that frustration personally, but he had observed it from very close proximity. It was a slow poison that drove the strongest of men to madness and led them to commit atrocities that they would grow to regret at a later stage of their lives.

Bakugou’s unyielding ambition to become the top pro hero in Japan was something that he shared with his father, Endeavor. And let’s be honest here: Bakugou didn’t exactly have the cleanest track record up until now either, especially when it came to some of his actions in his childhood and teenage years. So hearing him say that he had his own measuring tool for success that did not rely on metrics highly influenced by others was very reassuring. Even if the goal was the same, Bakugou would not go down the same tragic path that Endeavor had while chasing the number one spot.

“I’m not saying this just for the sake of saying it or to make you feel

better. But out of everyone I know, you'd always be my first pick," said Todoroki, grabbing the first aid box from his 'husband's' hands to prevent him from using storing it away as an excuse to move away from that spot. That annoyed Bakugou a little bit, the way he threw him a peeved glare, but the most important thing was that he remained where he was, silently listening to what Todoroki had to say. "I get along better with Midoriya and Iida, and I do recognise that they are very reliable friends and pro heroes. But there are some things they don't understand, and I'm not good enough with words to explain it to them either. On the other hand, you do. Whether I explain it badly or don't say anything at all, you always get it right. Hissy fits and temper tantrums aside, you also make everything so much easier for everyone around you. The HPS Commission is missing out on a lot by trying to cage you in the same box as everyone else."

"All I hear is you bragging about how you managed to nab yourself a convenient caretaker until you're able to do everything on your own…" grumbled Bakugou, his scowling face softening a little bit as it gained a more sulky undertone. He yanked the first aid box out of Todoroki's grasp and pulled it back into his lap once again.

"Caretaker is a bit… I see it more as gaining a skilled partner, maybe?" explained Todoroki, his head cocked to the left as he tried to come up with a more suitable term. "Besides, there's more to it than you making my life easier. Being reminded all over again of how good you are at everything you do has been motivating me to try to do better myself. I might never become as skilled as you are at certain things, like cooking, but I also don't want to lose all the time or be left too behind. And the same goes for hero activities. You might not think much of the Hero Billboard now, but I'm still going to use my high standing in it as a badge of honour. I'm also going to be as evil and petty about it as you usually are and rub in your face the fact that I've surpassed you in it at every chance I get. Like right now."

"…….Pfft!" Bakugou quietly stared at Todoroki's expressionless face for a few seconds more before he sputtered into laughter. The type of laughter that made it impossible for someone to breathe right or stay sitting completely still. "Ahahahaha! Skilled partner, he says… Ahahahaha! And to admit you won't ever be as good as me and yet

claim you won't lose either! Pfft, ridiculous! Ahahaha! Seriously, just how lame can you be? Ahahahahaha!"

"I think you're laughing a bit too much…" mumbled Todoroki, deadpanning his deadpan face even harder. Inside, however, he was relishing every single second of his 'spouse's' laughter. It was a very rare event, and it should be treated as such whenever he was lucky enough to witness it. "And I did mean everything I just said. Including not losing against you, both on and off the clock."

"Yeah, I know," said Bakugou, wiping the corners of his eyes with the back of his fingers after laughing so hard that he was brought to the point of tears. On his lips was a knowing smirk that could easily cosplay as a wholesome smile any time of the day. "You might fool everyone else around you, but that ugly expressionless mug of yours will never work on me. Also, ain't no way you're ever gonna win against me. When I get my hands on the number one spot on anything, the only way to steal the title away from me is to pry it out of my cold, dead hands. And good luck trying to keep me dead for long enough to do just that."

"The way you phrase things is always so violent, and yet, somehow, you make even the most morbid of sentences sound so cute when you have that look on your face," deadpanned Todoroki, blurting out those words before his brain could fully catch up with his racing heartbeat. He should thank Bakugou, because now that he had his hands free once again, he could easily capture that adorable smile if he felt inclined to do so. Which he did. Without any hesitation or second thoughts. Todoroki cupped Bakugou's face with his hands, feeling with his own skin the moment his cheeks became slightly more puffed thanks to pouting.

"Either you need to have your eyes checked by a reputable doctor, or your taste in cuteness is the most fucked up thing in this entire planet," grumbled Bakugou, leaving his dissatisfaction over being called cute for the nth time that week known.

“No, you’re cute. That’s all there is to it,” corrected Todoroki with a slight shake of his head. The way Bakugou’s face became even sulkier and his cheekbones gained a pink dusting to it was like the universe coming in clutch and telling him that he was the one in the right this time. Cuteness was very much relative and up to each individual’s opinion, but Todoroki was certain that it would be blatantly wrong to deny how adorable his ‘husband’ was every now and then.

“I’m not even going to waste my time arguing with you on something this dumb…” sighed Bakugou, raising the white flag this early in the game only so he’d spare himself from yet another silly back-and-forth argument. He had long learned his lesson about how useless it was to try to debate Todoroki on cute-related matters, doubly so if the so-called cute thing being discussed was him. Bakugou then grabbed both of Todoroki’s wrists, tugging on them to urge him to release his face. “C’mon, let go. I don’t know about you, but I still have other stuff I want to get done today.”

“.....”

“Hey, are you listening to me? Hurry up and let go,” Bakugou ordered a second time, as Todoroki had continued to squish his cheeks and face between his hands while silently staring fixedly at him. One way or another, his ‘alert system’ was already starting to ping as a warning for what could be about to come his way. “Hey! Stop ignoring me and say something, damn it!”

“Oh, sorry. I got distracted by how cute you are when sulking at me,” apologised Todoroki, even though he wasn’t even in the beginning stages of actually letting go of his face. This was just too good of a moment to let it slip through his fingers just like that. He might as well make it worth their while and use it as the starting point for today’s kissing quota. Todoroki changed the angle of his hands slightly - mainly because of the tugging on his wrists - and brought Bakugou’s face closer while also leaning forward. Perhaps because their breakfast had been so sugary, that little kiss too felt as sweet as candy and twice as delicious.

"...When exactly will you get tired of doing this crap all the damn time…?" grumbled Bakugou, scrunching up his face to try to mask the rising temperature of his cheeks - which was totally being caused by Todoroki's hands or maybe even his Quirk, NOT by him blushing, yes, definitely!

"That will never happen," declared Todoroki. There was quite a lot that he did not know or hadn't learned yet. But of this he was sure. It was simply unthinkable that he would one day get tired of kissing Bakugou. He enjoyed it far too much for that to ever happen, and no amount of kisses was enough to fully satisfy the intense craving he felt for those soft, warm lips. If Bakugou outright told him never to kiss him again, it would be one thing. But Todoroki would never take the initiative to end their daily kissing quota.

"Tsk…" Bakugou promptly clicked his tongue in halfhearted annoyance at that (expected) response. He knew what was currently going through Todoroki's mind. He knew all he had to do was say, 'we're stopping with the kisses', and that would be the end of it. No more kisses, no more complaining from him. It was because Bakugou knew all of that that he kept his mouth shut and continued silently sulking at his 'husband'.

Yeah, he really is adorable, chuckled Todoroki in the back of his mind, a small smile tugging at the corner of his lips. A second later, he was on the attack once again, squishing those cute, blushing cheeks while smooching the air out of Bakugou's lungs.

"Mmmnghh…!" Not having expected to be literally pounced like that, Bakugou ended up toppling backwards, the first aid box slipping out of his lap and dropping on the floor with a loud clatter. His arms and hands flailed about at first, but as he got more and more breathless by that ridiculously long and intense kiss, he switched to tapping his surrender directly on Todoroki's bare back. By the time his emergency request bypassed his 'husband's' thick skull and he pulled his lips away, Bakugou was gasping for some crisp oxygen, the entirety of his

face and even the tips of his ears bright red. “Haa, haah…! A-Are you… Are you tryin’ to kill me…!?”

“Sorry,” apologised Todoroki, even though neither his expressionless face nor his tone sounded all that repentant. If anything, he felt that second kiss had been quite lacking. Well, they didn’t have any plans for today, so a third, even better kiss wouldn’t hurt anyone, would it? “Just one more and then we’re done for now.”

“Wha- Mmngggh…!!!!!”

It was needless to say that this third time ended up not being the charm and that neither of them got to leave the sofa for a good, long while.

Chapter 61

“Katsuki, there’s something I’d like to request,” said Todoroki, hovering near the kitchen counter as his ‘husband’ went about heating up last night’s leftovers for their lunch. Unfortunately, since no cooking was being done, he did not have the necessary excuse to glue himself to Bakugou this time, which was leaving him strangely fidgety and unable to find a good spot or position to stand inside the kitchen. That jittery behaviour might have been the reason why the only thing that came out of Bakugou’s mouth was…

“No,” declared Bakugou, cutting right to the chase as he busied himself with removing a plastic food container from the microwave and placing another one inside.

“I haven’t said what the request is yet,” pointed out Todoroki, that resounding ‘no’ having paralysed his fidgeting instantly.

“Whatever it might be, the answer is no,” Bakugou asserted, not allowing himself to fall for his ‘husband’s’ puppy dog eyes or the way his shoulders dropped despondently at that second denial. He did roll his eyes a little bit when he felt those puppy dog eyes also dropping somewhat, even though he hadn’t taken a single glance at Todoroki’s expressionless face while preparing their lunch. The silence was loud enough and told him everything he needed to know - to the point of annoyance, even. “Oh, c’mon! You’re an adult! Deal with being told ‘no’ like one!”

“Again, I haven’t said anything yet,” noted Todoroki, an eyebrow slightly arched at those sudden hisses. It would be one thing if he had started throwing a temper tantrum like a certain moody blonde did at times, but all he was doing was standing in the same spot as before, quietly observing Bakugou doing his thing without getting in the way.

“You don’t have to! Your ugly face is doing all of the work for your mouth!” complained Bakugou, having somehow ended up as the one throwing the temper tantrum, and for a reason that, in a way, was fully outside of his control. Without meaning to, or even being fully conscious of it, Bakugou folded frighteningly fast after that by asking, “Just what is it that you want now!?”

“Bunny apples,” said Todoroki, getting his request out as quickly as possible so that his ‘husband’ wouldn’t have enough time to change his mind and order him to shut up.

“.....Huh?” That was all Bakugou managed to blurt out, his mouth hanging wide open for what felt like hours on end. Those two words had come out of a left field so far away on the horizon that they might as well have been on the other end of the universe up until a few seconds ago. The intergalactic travel they had been subjected to gave them enough punching power to leave Bakugou completely flabbergasted and at a total loss for what to say or do.

“Bunny apples,” repeated Todoroki, thinking that the confused expression on Bakugou’s face had been caused by him having misheard what he had just said. Or perhaps he was being far too brief and not conveying his request in an appropriate manner. Bakugou might be really good at reading other people, but he wasn’t necessarily a miraculous mind reader. There might be some instances that even his brilliant skills couldn’t do anything about. “I wanna eat bunny apples for dessert today.”

“Bunny… apples…” said Bakugou very cautiously, part of him expecting some sort of hidden trap to befall him the moment he bit into this weird-ass bait of a food request.

“Yeah, bunny apples,” acknowledged Todoroki, turning around briefly to grab the fruit bowl filled with shiny red apples from the opposite kitchen counter. He tilted his head slightly when he saw Bakugou glance down at the apples and then stare right back at him with an

arched eyebrow. “You don’t know how to make bunny apples?”

“Of course I know how to make bunny apples,” scoffed Bakugou, his pride as a genius cook slightly offended that such a thought had breached all the way into Todoroki’s mouth. “The real question here is why the hell do you want bunny apples!”

“I’ve just been feeling like it for a while now,” explained Todoroki with a small shrug of his shoulders. There wasn’t much to it, really. Watching how well Bakugou cooked planted that small seedling in his mind days ago, and it refused to leave by taking some deep roots in there. That’s how he ended up purchasing apples that weren’t on the shopping list he had cheated to acquire. “I can’t cut the apples like that, so I figured I could ask you to do it for me. It’s not a time-consuming or bothersome request, right?”

“...Your brain definitely needs to be fully scanned and researched…” sighed Bakugou, breathing out those words more to himself than actually to his kitchen companion. It turned out that there wasn’t any sneaky trap hidden within that request, as Todoroki seemed to be genuine about it, but it had gotten him questioning if his ‘husband’ was alright in the upstairs department. He had been pulling ridiculous stunts after ridiculous stunts lately, which wasn’t 100% abnormal for someone like Todoroki, but the sudden increase was a bit unsettling. *Seriously, just what exactly is going on inside of his thick, dense brain? Is the boredom of such a long vacation scrambling his marbles even more than usual or something?*

“Is that a ‘no’ or…?” asked Todoroki very cautiously, unable to tell whether this mild reaction was a good sign or not.

“Yeah, yeah, I’ll cut you some bunny apples once we’re done eating this,” Bakugou conceded while gesturing with his thumb to the food he was warming up. Both the softness of his voice and the unassertive words that were used almost came across as something a parent would say to a young child who had just made a slightly selfish request. This

time around, that didn't go unnoticed by Bakugou, and a big, sour frown appeared on his face a second after he had said that sentence. He was about to turn around and tell Todoroki that he had changed his mind and to cut the damn bunny apples himself when he was suddenly kissed. "……!?"

"Thanks," said Todoroki, a small smile on his lips as he happily carried the fruit bowl from the kitchen to the dining table in the living room. He took his time setting it down, observing the table very seriously before he decided which would be the best spot for the fruit bowl.

"……!!" Bakugou opened and closed his mouth a couple of times, even though not a single sound left his vocal cords. The moment his stupefaction melted just a little bit, he hastily turned around and faced the microwave once again. His cheekbones were heating up scary fast, and there was no way he could let anyone - much less Todoroki!!! - see any of that. *One of these days, I'm seriously gonna end that bastard's miserable existence! …No, wait, I can't. That would affect our mission… Damn it! I'm still gonna kill him. In my mind. Again and again. Specifically, with the knife I'll use to cut those fucking bunny apples!*

Oblivious to his (hypothetical) doom, Todoroki returned to the kitchen to grab the next set of tableware and food, and then transported them to the dining table too. With two people tag-teaming the meal spread, everything got done in the blink of an eye. Of course, the fact that Bakugou had made extra food and neatly stored everything in food containers the previous day was the biggest proponent for that speed and ease. The overall goal behind it had been to show Todoroki how planning ahead and thinking long-term made daily life a heck of a lot easier, both solo and for a small family of two.

Given that Todoroki was expressionlessly (but quite happily) chowing down on the food without much complaint and plenty of occasional praising remarks, Bakugou deemed that goal to have been fully met.

“Hey. While you were dillydalling outside, I finished updating the cooking notebook. Including the stuff I’ll be making for dinner tonight,” said Bakugou after he was done swallowing a bite out of a carrot beef roll. “Once you’re done eating, go do your ‘homework’ and study what’s written in it. If you get full marks on my lil’ quiz, I’ll give you another nice reward.”

“I don’t need any rewards,” deadpanned Todoroki, calmly using his chopsticks to grab himself some more of the wonderfully delicious bean sprouts salad (the non-spicy version). “Just stop with the ‘heys’ and call me by my name instead. You haven’t said ‘Shouto’ even once since last night.”

“...uh…” Bakugou’s hand shook slightly as he also reached for some more food. He wasn’t counting on being called out like that, especially by someone who was usually a complete airhead and wouldn’t notice the little details if they were slapped straight into his face…

“Practice makes perfect, right?” pointed out Todoroki, aiming for an indisputable victory in this small verbal match. “I’ll do my ‘homework’ properly, so you should work hard to do yours too, Katsuki.”

“I hate you so damn much… Shouto…” grumbled Bakugou, throwing in the name at the end against his will. He couldn’t wait for the day they went back to work. Then he wouldn’t have to call his ‘husband’ by his first name but rather by his pro hero name. Who cared that the name was technically the same? The fact that one was written in kanji and the other in katakana made them completely separate titles in Bakugou’s mind.

“If ‘I hate you’ always precedes my name, our fake relationship will be caught in record time,” warned Todoroki with a certain worry, bless his silly, dense heart. “You should be a bit more careful with that from now on, especially when we’re not at home.”

“You think I don’t know that, you moron!?” hissed Bakugou, sideways kicking Todoroki’s shin in retaliation for that annoyingly obvious comment. “I won’t say it out loud whenever other people are around, but you can bet your ass I’ll be inwardly cursing the shit out of you every single time I’m forced to spit out your stupid name!”

“You don’t like my name?” asked Todoroki, his head slightly tilted as he took some rice to his mouth. He sincerely did not understand why Bakugou was so resistant to saying his name. A name was a name, right? If he could call him by his family name without any issue, his first name shouldn’t be that big of a deal either. With that said, Todoroki had to admit that being called ‘Shouto’ by Bakugou had a different, more intimate ring to it. He had felt so the previous night as his name was moaned again and again, and he could feel it even now, despite the begrudging tone in his ‘husband’s’ voice. *I wonder why it feels so different… It’s the same as my pro hero name, and Katsuki always calls me ‘Shouto’ when we’re working, but there’s still something about it that’s a bit… special, maybe? How weird…*

“Like or dislike has nothing to do with it. I just hate being told what to do,” grumbled Bakugou after a haughty scoff.

“Given the circumstances, there’s not much we can do about that,” Todoroki pointed out while letting out a small sigh. He was relieved that his name wasn’t the problem per se after all. It meant that maybe time and habit were the best cure for his petulance on this one subject. Todoroki wholeheartedly hoped that, one day, Bakugou would call his name because he wanted to, not because circumstances demanded it or he was strong-armed into doing so. Though that day seemed to be very far away in the distant future as of right now…

“I know, and that pisses me off even more,” said Bakugou, angrily stabbing his chopsticks in another carrot beef roll rather than using them to grab it. “I’m so gonna destroy every single one of them for all of this that they are making me go through… Both those lunatics and Endeavor have their days numbered, mark my words!”

“Speaking of which, what should we do about the rest of our vacation?” asked Todoroki, inwardly chuckling at that vicious declaration. Bakugou’s drive for an indisputable victory in all aspects of his life truly was one of the most fascinating parts of his personality. Not even a prolonged war of attrition against two different fronts seemed to faze him - if anything, having tough opponents made his competitive spirit burn even stronger. “We’ve finished our house move ahead of schedule and without any further issues. We’ve also successfully gone on a fake date and spread the word of our fake marriage far and wide. I get the feeling that today you just want to stay at home and do your things around the apartment. But what about the weekend?”

“For starters, I wanna use this weekend as the final transition period before we go back to work,” declared Bakugou, his moody facial expression softening into a more serious, business-oriented demeanour as he proceeded with gobbling up his lunch. “All loose ends need to be dealt with for good by the end of Sunday.”

“Oh. Then shouldn’t you have also gone out with me this morning?” noted Todoroki, one of his eyebrows getting ever so slightly arched as he sideways peeked at his ‘spouse’. “I’m pretty much done updating all of my personal info, from the new address to the new marital status. I think the only one that is left to do is with the HPS Commission, but that can be easily done next week.”

“I’ve done that ages ago,” snorted Bakugou, grabbing his smartphone from his pocket and setting it on the dining table beside him. He lightly tapped the screen with his fingertip as he smirked victoriously. “The modern world sure is convenient. I don’t even have to leave the comfort of my new home to get paperwork done.”

“You… You can do that?” asked Todoroki, blinking his eyes a couple of times out of surprise. He had no idea such a thing was possible in a country as analogue as Japan. “Why didn’t you say something? I could have done the grocery shopping and grabbed breakfast much faster.”

“You didn’t ask,” pointed out Bakugou with a dismissive shrug of his shoulders, even though his lips were twisted into a devilish smirk. He was enjoying every single inch of Todoroki’s stony, expressionless demeanour, even if he wasn’t exactly staring at it. “Administrative tasks aside, there’s not much to do around the apartment since I’ve been keeping up with my side of the house chores just fine.”

“Yeah, I’ve also been taking care of everything I’m in charge of,” acknowledged Todoroki, having decided to put aside his complaints over his ‘spouse’s’ mischievous little prank. He had told himself he was going to let Bakugou be his full egotistical gremlin self for the rest of the day, and it wasn’t going to be something this harmless that would change his mind on it.

“I’m still waiting for Best Jeanist’s report, so I don’t wanna make any concrete plans for this weekend just yet. But I’m definitely going back to my usual schedule for days off starting tomorrow,” continued Bakugou, a bit bummed that he didn’t get another opportunity to admonish Todoroki and his lazy ass. His friends were the avoidant type, especially for tasks they didn’t enjoy, so he was used to having to chase them around to force them to do stuff, from homework and studying to taking care of the mess they had created somewhere at the dorm. But with Todoroki, it seemed he didn’t have to worry about that too much. He had, however, one very particular thing he seriously had to stress over. “Which means, if you continue messing up my sleep schedule, you will find out what moody *really* looks like real fast. I will also make sure you cannot walk for the rest of the day if I can’t get up from bed at my usual time and go do my morning training. I’m thinking of starting it off with a broken leg and building it up from there. After 24 hours of that, though, I promise I’ll take you to Recovery Girl, and she’ll fix you up until you look brand new.”

“……” Whether that was Bakugou going on yet another sarcastic ranting session or not, Todoroki couldn’t quite tell. The general message within those ‘threats’ was delivered in full, though. He needed to be really careful when making a move on his ‘husband’ from now on, or scratches and bite marks would be the least of his concerns.

Plus, it seemed that his earlier analysis on this matter had been spot-on: his daily life with Bakugou really was going to be completely different depending on whether they were working or on a day off. How different they were going to be was still very much up for debate, but Todoroki had the feeling he was very close to finding out. They were three days away from returning to work, after all. Part of him was already mourning the loss of certain aspects of their vacation-mode lifestyle, while the rest was actually very excited for this upcoming phase of their fake marital life.

Since Bakugou was so into micromanaging his own life and those around him, Todoroki sort of wanted to ask him if creating some sort of schedule for their sex life would maybe help fix any problematic side effects in the long run. But with how stubborn Bakugou was about that whole 'we are never, ever sleeping together again!' shtick of his, making such a suggestion seemed extremely dangerous. It could even lead to a full-on ban if Todoroki accidentally misspoke in a way that ruffled Bakugou's feathers.

With that scary possibility in mind, Todoroki decided to keep quiet for the time being while trying to come up with the best way to suggest that sort of arrangement. It wasn't as if he was in a rush to settle this, not after they had enjoyed such a passionate night just a few hours prior. He was totally fine with waiting for the right opportu-

"But if it doesn't interfere with any of that, it's fine every now and then… I guess…" Bakugou said without any warning, his voice becoming smaller and smaller as that sentence approached its ending. When Todoroki turned his head at the speed of light to better face and gawk at him, he too turned his head in the opposite direction, making sure that he couldn't get a good eyeful of whatever it was that his face looked like right now.

"Really?" asked Todoroki, craning his neck some more to try to take a peek at his 'husband's' face. But that only made Bakugou turn his back on him even more stubbornly. "You're not saying that just to tease and

toy with me, right?"

"Keep pestering me, and I will change my mind…" grumbled Bakugou as his last warning. It wasn't as if he wanted to continue having sex with Todoroki or anything, no, sir. He was simply mitigating any possible foreseeable dangers in his future. Since Bakugou couldn't say no to him and his perverted passes on him, and since they always ended up going at it a bit too hard, he might as well make the best out of it in the safest way possible. Whenever he thought about it calmly, the conclusion was that if the primary objective was to deal with his sexual needs in the best way possible, wasn't doing it with Todoroki truly the most optimal course of action? That decision was the purely logical one, with no other reasons behind it fueling his choice. Yes, definitely. Logic and a sensible ROI plan were all there was to it. That was all there *could* be to it.

"Sorry," apologised Todoroki, promptly straightening his sitting position. It wasn't anything definite per se, but he was more than happy with a direct 'it's fine every now and then'. It was certainly a thousand times more reassuring than all of their prior unresolved conversations. The fact it had been said by Bakugou himself completely unprompted also made it exponentially better. *Despite all of his complaints and hissy fits, he really does like having sex with me, huh… That's good to know. I just wish Katsuki could have said that while we weren't in the middle of eating lunch…*

"Of course I'm saying it while we're eating… This way, you can't jump me instantly," Bakugou muttered, his words once again coming out of nowhere. It didn't take a genius… No, actually, it did take a genius to figure out what was crossing through Todoroki's mind at the moment. Hence why Bakugou was the one person who could do it so flawlessly and effortlessly.

"Oh," gasped Todoroki, his chopsticks halting halfway to his food. He peered sideways at his 'husband', wholeheartedly amazed at what had just happened. "You really are good at reading my mind. I'm kinda curious about how you do that. Does it work on everyone you know?"

“As if,” scoffed Bakugou while rolling his eyes at that silly question. “You’re just particularly easy to read, since you’re so excruciatingly dense and simpleminded. Your ugly mug is also like an open book most of the time.”

“Yeah, that’s not what everyone else has to say about my mind, let alone my face,” deadpanned Todoroki, not really buying that explanation. There definitely was more to it than just visual cues on his expressionless demeanour, but he highly doubted that Bakugou would tell him the secret behind it if he was this avoidant of a straightforward answer.

“Yeah, but I’m not ‘everyone else’. I’m good at everything I do. Why would this be any different?” Bakugou pointed out, a smug smirk on his lips as he methodically grabbed a piece of simmered fried tofu and made a show out of popping it in his mouth.

“Oh. You’ve got a point there,” acknowledged Todoroki, unable to contradict a single part of that arrogant self-evaluation. “I’m still curious about how you do it, but it’s not like I hate it or anything. I find it a very convenient skill, for the most part.”

“Most people would find it annoying or intrusive, but of course *you* think it’s convenient,” sighed Bakugou at the same time he lightly shook his head. He wasn’t necessarily complaining about it, though.

Bakugou might use this sort of skill to win an argument ahead of time every now and then, but he never did it with any ill intentions. He even often stayed quiet about it whenever he read other people and whatever was crossing their minds while around him. It was simply something he did unconsciously, perhaps because his intuition was so good and his high intellect filled in all of the remaining gaps right afterwards. This made him not only a really good judge of character, but also a very talented strategist - both skill sets he used daily as a

high-ranking pro hero.

However, it did come with some negatives. For starters, it rubbed quite a lot of other people the wrong way. Most people weren't as welcome as Todoroki at having some of their inner thoughts known by someone else, much less by someone who had zero issues with using that information against them. There was a fair share of people in the pro hero trade who really valued Dynamight's managerial and strategic skills while at work, but otherwise avoided him like the plague once they were done for the day.

The biggest 'downside', however, was how unfriendly and unapproachable it had made him. Not because everyone ran away to the hills the moment they saw him, but because Bakugou himself couldn't be bothered to be around the people he didn't approve of. If he could tell at first glance who was a genuinely good person and who was faking their whole persona for this or that reason, why would he go out of his way to associate himself with the latter? Even if a personal connection would benefit him in the long run or open up opportunities for his pro hero career, Bakugou would rather have nothing to do with them if he could help it.

On one hand, that really limited his popularity, both inside and outside the pro hero trade. But on the other hand, it always kept him far away from any developing scandals or led him to catch someone shady red-handed, which ultimately maintained his reputation of being a 'squeaky-clean' pro hero despite looking like a demonic overlord nine times out of ten.

Taking all of this into consideration, having one person who actually liked and valued this characteristic of his was kind of a breath of fresh air for Bakugou. And since this was Todoroki he was speaking of here, there was quite literally no difference between what went through his mind and the things that came out of his mouth. The man he had 'married' was possibly the least two-faced and hypocritical person on the planet, either because he was too dense to think he needed to do so or because he was too stupidly straightforward to lie to other people.

Of course, that did not fully eliminate the annoyance Bakugou felt at having to deal with his 'husband's' silly antics and obnoxiously thick brain, as well as his perpetual lack of common sense and unfamiliarity with regular parts of a normal daily life. But knowing he didn't mean any harm by it or that he wasn't doing it on purpose to skirt his responsibilities made it a bit more tolerable. Bakugou would still tell him off for it and maybe even poke fun at him, but his next move after that would always be to patiently right the wrongs, even if it involved teaching ridiculously basic things to a grown-up man.

If someone else had asked me to cook for them in the same way this dense idiot did, I would have poisoned them the very next meal to teach them a nice lesson. But I'm giving him a pass this one time since he does genuinely seem to like my food the best out of all the stuff we've been eating together…, Bakugou grumbled in the back of his mind, preparing himself to shift from finishing his meal to preparing their requested dessert. He moved his plates and cutlery aside to pull the fruit bowl and paring knife closer to him. Bakugou could already feel the silent, expressionless excitement exuding out of Todoroki's heterochromatic gaze, much to his vexation. "Can you calm the fuck down!? These are just normal apples! The taste is the same, whichever way you cut them! Keep blowing bunny apples out of proportion, and you're gonna be extremely disappointed the moment you take the first bite!"

"I know they are normal apples and that the way they are cut doesn't change or improve the flavour," reassured Todoroki, also clearing his side of the dining table so he could welcome the oh-so-anticipated bunny apples. "I'm still looking forward to eating them."

"Fine. Just don't complain when you get a very underwhelming experience," sighed Bakugou, having concluded that there was no use arguing with Todoroki on his matter either. If he wanted bunny apples, he'd give him bunny apples, for as childish and pointless as the whole thing seemed to him. He grabbed one of the apples from the fruit bowl and started cutting it into twice-halved slices. "What's gotten you so pressed for them to begin with? Have you never eaten bunny apples before or something?"

“No, I’m pretty sure I have. It was a long, long time ago, so my memories of it are kinda fuzzy,” said Todoroki, closely observing the way Bakugou cut the apple and then partially carved the red skin to give each slice its characteristic bunny shape. “But whether I have eaten it before or not is not the point. I simply want to eat your bunny apples. That’s all.”

“That doesn’t really answer my question, does it?” scoffed Bakugou while rolling his eyes just a smidge. He quickly got the first bunny-shaped slice finished and placed it on the small dessert plate in front of Todoroki. “Have fun demolishing that cute rabbit, you sick monster.”

“Oh. It looks just like the ones I see featured on photos online,” noted Todoroki, carefully picking up the dessert plate with both hands and bringing it up to eye level. He studied the apple slice from different angles in a very serious fashion, taking in every little detail of it. The bunny apple could stand upright perfectly, its red ‘ears’ slightly elevated above the white body. While it wasn’t a 100% faithful depiction of a rabbit, there was no question what was the animal it was meant to represent.

“Hurry up and eat it already,” said Bakugou as he added a second bunny-shaped apple slice to the elevated plate. “The white will turn to brown from the oxidation if you wait too long. And that does impact the flavour a bit.”

“I can’t let that happen,” gasped Todoroki, immediately putting the plate down and grabbing the first slice. He took a bite at it, starting from the ‘head’, and relished the sweet yet tart flavour of the freshly cut apple. “It’s delicious.”

“Is that so?” acknowledged Bakugou with a halfhearted tone. He hadn’t grown or even chosen those apples, so he had little to no

involvement in how good the fruit tasted. Todoroki seemed to be happy with it, though, and that was probably the most important thing there. It meant they would be able to drop this whole bunny apple business once and for all the moment he had eaten his fill of it.

“Here.” Right after Todoroki popped the rest of the apple slice on his mouth, he grabbed the second one and motioned it towards Bakugou. The arched eyebrow that this offer raised made him hastily add an explanation while bringing that slice closer to his ‘husband’s’ mouth. “You’re too fast at making the bunny apples. I can’t eat them all on my own before they start turning dark.”

“Hmph! Just make sure you keep your hands out of the way,” scoffed Bakugou, using the same dismissive tone of always, even though he was actually accepting Todoroki’s food offering. He added the bunny apple he had just finished cutting to the dessert plate and then took a bite out of the slice being held by his ‘husband’. His hands were too busy at the moment for him to eat on his own - that became his reluctant excuse as to why he was letting Todoroki feed him. “With how late we ate breakfast, one’s enough, right?”

“Make it two,” requested Todoroki, picking up the third bunny apple with his free hand to continue munching on that home-made delicacy too. “One for me, one for you.”

“Suit yourself,” said Bakugou, shrugging his shoulders at that answer. One apple, two apples… It was all the same to him, so long as Todoroki had enough space in his stomach to finish it all and not waste any food.

“Thanks, Katsuki.”

“Yeah, yeah.”

Bunny apples aren't too bad, they both thought at that moment, surrounded by the sweet fragrance of freshly cut red apples in their serene apartment.

Chapter 62

“Tsk… Still nothing from Jeanist…” Bakugou grumbled under his breath after checking his smartphone for new messages or emails for what felt like the millionth time.

“You know that these things take some time,” pointed out Todoroki, having caught his ‘husband’ in the act as he joined him on the sofa after having completed his post-dinner chores.

“I know that! But it’s been over half a day already!” hissed Bakugou in retaliation, not in the mood for any consolation speeches at the moment. “The least he could do is say something, anything at all, just to let me know what’s taking him so long! It’s not like texting ‘I’m still looking into it’ would have stolen too many seconds out of his busy schedule!”

“If you know he’s busy, then you can’t really blame him for prioritising official matters over unofficial ones, right?” said Todoroki, forced to be the voice of reason to Bakugou’s hissy fit. That got his ‘spouse’ to scowl at him even harder, cross his arms over his chest in a clear display of annoyance, and turn his head in the opposite direction with a miffed ‘hmph!’ They were back into sulking territory, by the looks of it.

It wasn’t as if Todoroki couldn’t understand how Bakugou must have been feeling at the moment. If they hadn’t been on vacation, he was sure that his ‘husband’ would have checked that case personally and ascertained whether it was connected to their unofficial mission or not. But with their current schedule, the earliest he would be able to do that would be on the upcoming Monday. Given the seriousness of the case - research-grade computers were no joke, and neither were any plans that required them to begin with -, Bakugou could not afford to sit tight and wait for that long. He had to do the unthinkable and rely on the few allies he had who were aware of his unofficial mission.

Bakugou had kept a great front throughout the day, going about the quintessential home-based tasks he had added to his schedule as if normal. The only clue that something else was going on in the background was the number of times he checked his smartphone. But as the hours ticked by and the bright sky turned into a dark golden dusk, the built-up impatience became a whole lot more visible in every single one of his actions.

For as dense and scatterbrained as Todoroki might be, even he noticed all of that. He wasn't exactly walking on eggshells the entire afternoon and evening, but he did put some more effort into being on his best behaviour. He did his 'homework' like a model honour student would have, and aced the little quiz that Bakugou had hinted at earlier in the day. While he didn't receive a reward per se, Todoroki could tell that his 'husband' had gone out of his way to call him by his given name more often, rather than his surname or whatever colourful descriptor he felt like using at that moment. Deep down, Todoroki had gotten exactly what he had asked for, which could be interpreted as having received a 'reward' for his hard work.

It went without saying that Todoroki was over the moon happy with that. Every time Bakugou called his name, he could feel his chest doing this funny little thing that he couldn't quite describe. It wasn't painful or bothersome, just a bit different from the normal he was used to.

He initially wondered if that feeling would fade over time once he got used to it. But then he remembered - wasn't he technically already used to hearing Bakugou call him 'Shouto'? They had been pro heroes for a few years now, and that was his pro hero name too. It went without saying that Bakugou used his pro hero name whenever they were working. Todoroki then remembered yet another thing - hadn't he also thought the same about the excitement he felt whenever he kissed Bakugou? And yet, that excitement was yet to fade. If anything, it was now stronger than ever, to the point he had to actively tell himself not to go too crazy every single time they kissed. After adding one plus one, Todoroki made peace with experiencing that funny little

sensation on his chest for the rest of his life whenever Bakugou called him by his name (and not by his pro hero name).

After Todoroki cleared Bakugou's quiz without any difficulties, the remainder of their evening also went swimmingly. For dinner, Bakugou taught him a few more simple dishes, this time focused on how to use the mishmash of ingredients that were leftover from the other recipes they had been cooking lately. As per usual, he glued himself to his 'husband' as he went about each step of the recipes. Since Todoroki had read them ahead of time while 'studying', he asked some pertinent questions now and then, which, strangely enough, seemed to have pleased Bakugou immensely. He probably had associated that with Todoroki taking his cooking lessons seriously. He wasn't exactly wrong about that, but it came about as an unintended side effect. Todoroki did, however, take note of that for future cooking moments.

Dinner went by, the cleaning up after the fact was concluded, and here they were now, sitting on the sofa for their post-meal downtime, a habit both of them were slowly but surely getting into.

"Hm… Should we do some more research while we wait for Best Jeanist's report?" suggested Todoroki after a long but peaceful stretch of silence. Before Bakugou had the opportunity to reply, he motioned his hand forward and grabbed the TV's remote control from the nearby low table, promptly turning it on and skipping through the channels while looking around for the right programming.

"By research, you don't mean…" grumbled Bakugou, already having a bad feeling about this. The fact that Todoroki paused his browsing on a channel currently airing whatever evening TV drama that might have been told him he had been spot on with his preemptive assessment. Bakugou jumped up from his seat on the sofa and turned around. "I'm gonna wait for his report in my room."

"No. You need this research way more than I do," deadpanned

Todoroki, immediately grabbing the back of Bakugou's clothes to prevent him from scurrying away. With a very intentional yank on his clothes, he got his 'husband' to sink back down on the sofa. Then, to make sure he wouldn't go anywhere, Todoroki wrapped his arm around his waist and clutched at his t-shirt with an iron fist, sort of like a dog owner putting a leash on a pup that was well-known for lightning-fast sprints. "You missed yesterday's movie with your nap. You need to make up for it by paying extra attention to our research tonight. Plus, you were the one who originally wanted to do this."

"Not like this, I didn't!" hissed Bakugou, giving a strong pull to Todoroki's arm to free himself from his hold on his clothes. However, his hand didn't budge even a single fraction of an inch. It was like an immovable rock, there to stay until the owner of that limb deemed their research to be concluded for the day. To say that Bakugou was already fuming mad, but also feeling embarrassed as heck, would be an understatement. "Why do we have to do this so-called research together? You can watch those crappy TV shows here, and I can do whatever research I deem necessary for our mission in my room!"

"I can't trust you with this sort of delicate research, unfortunately," said Todoroki, scootching closer to Bakugou to make up for all the yanking and thrashing about. Even if his 'husband' went full feral on him once again and scratched him all over, he had decided a long time ago (read: yesterday) that he would complete this research. And by 'research', he wasn't talking about the same research that Bakugou wanted to do by watching romance TV dramas. Todoroki's true aim was to find out how long it took for his 'husband' to fall asleep while watching said romance TV dramas. *I missed the moment he fell asleep while watching the movie, but I'm definitely not letting that happen a second time. Tonight, I will find out the answers to yesterday's questions, no matter what.*

"What, you think I'm going to lie to you and say I watched something that I did not watch?" scoffed Bakugou while rolling his eyes at his own words.

"Yes," replied Todoroki, not even having to stop and think a little bit

about such a response. That was exactly the type of shenanigans his ‘husband’ would get himself involved in just so he wouldn’t have to do something he did not want to do - even if, again, such an idea was something he had come up with himself. “I wasn’t born yesterday either, Katsuki. And I was also around during all those times you came up with a million different excuses as to why you couldn’t participate in Height’s Alliance’s movie nights. I might not be able to read your mind, but I won’t fall for your lies either.”

“...Damn it…” Bakugou grumbled under his breath, slowly adjusting the position of his arms and body so he could sulkily lean back on the sofa, even with Todoroki glued to his left side. After a bit of fidgeting around, he ever so lightly poked the side of his ‘husband’s’ torso with his index finger, intending to create even if just a small wall of air between the two of them. “We’re in the middle of summer… It’s way too hot and humid for this…”

“That’s why I sat on this side and not the other,” acknowledged Todoroki, having foreseen that Bakugou would complain about precisely this, given how things had gone when they were cuddling in bed. He activated the ice side of his Quirk, which turned the right side of his body (aka the side that was pressed very close against his ‘husband’) into a pleasantly cool solid block. “Is this good enough, or do I need to drop the temperature even lower?”

“...Damn you, you walking, talking aircon…” Bakugou grumbled once again, officially out of ways to free himself from this monumental pain in the ass of a chore. “...At least pick something half decent, or you’re gonna make me want to claw my eyes out.”

“I have no idea what’s currently being aired in the channels we have here. You’ll have to make do with it for now until we can figure out what’s good and what’s not,” pointed out Todoroki, placing the remote control next to him on the sofa. He wasn’t an avid TV watcher, much less one who focused on shows meant purely for entertainment. To Todoroki, a TV was just another medium to get the latest news and keep himself updated on what was happening around the country outside his work hours. With his lack of experience with this sort of

stuff, he even doubted he could tell what was good and what was bad. “But if you don’t want to try out a bunch of stuff first, we can try asking Ashido and Hagakure for recommendations. They should know which current TV drama is the best.”

“Hell no!” Bakugou almost screeched, knowing very well how such a conversation would go. “Involve anyone else on this, and I’m breaking any TV we have in this house!”

“That sounds a bit too extreme,” deadpanned Todoroki, inwardly sighing at the fact Bakugou was already blowing things out of proportion (no pun intended). “It’s just a TV show recommendation, not the end of the world.”

“.....” Bakugou didn’t have to say anything else. He simply raised one of his hands and gestured towards the TV while making direct eye contact with Todoroki. The palm of his hand was obviously already crackling in preparation for an AP Shot.

“I get it already. No recommendations from external factions,” sighed Todoroki, pushing his ‘husband’s’ arm down before he caused any structural damage to either their belongings or the rented apartment. The sparks coming out of the palm of his hand stopped completely after a victorious ‘hmph’.

With how moody and unwilling Bakugou already was, Todoroki had to be really careful with his pick in entertainment for tonight. Not that he had all that much to choose from using a regular TV network of channels instead of streaming. Bakugou was definitely also aware of that. Since Todoroki wasn’t certain if he would use that to his benefit, he would glance at Bakugou each time he changed to a different channel to check what they had on at the moment. Five or so minutes of watching whatever was being aired at the moment was more than enough for Todoroki to closely study what he could see of Bakugou’s frowning features and decide whether the risk was worth it or not.

After maybe half an hour of switching channels back and forth, they finally settled on the last TV show they had come across, even though they had already missed a good chunk of it. If things got too dicey - in other words, if Bakugou started to get too annoyed at it -, Todoroki would go back to looking for something else to watch. But since the TV drama he had provisionally picked was a mix of romance, action, and a sprinkle of comedy, it was probably the least 'dangerous' of them all. Bakugou also didn't complain about it when he put down the remote control, which was as good as hearing a 'that's tolerable enough' in his 'husband's' lingo.

The TV drama wasn't all that bad, in Todoroki's opinion. It followed a similar type of plot to the movie they had watched the previous day, just different characters, a different setting, and different events. The essence was the same, save for the extra dose of action rather than the human drama the movie had focused on.

That also meant that it had the same failings as the movie - in specific, the fact that the main leads weren't a married couple (they weren't even a couple at all at this point in the story). But then again, weren't married main leads a rarity in this type of entertainment medium? Todoroki couldn't remember a single movie or show that had them as the main characters, only as side characters that would pop up now and then and were never truly fleshed out as much as everyone else.

I guess since so many people view marriage as the end goal, we never get to see what comes after that goal has been met, noted Todoroki in the back of his mind. In a way, he found that to be such a missed opportunity. His marriage with Bakugou wasn't even real, and yet he had been enjoying the whole experience dearly. Because of that, he couldn't even begin to imagine what it would be like to be in an honest-to-god marriage with the person they had been in a relationship with for the longest time now. The sheer amount of happiness such a thing would bring about was simply indescribable, Todoroki would bet. *No, I suppose this is another of those things that changes depending on each individual case. The person you end up marrying and how good of a relationship you two truly have are probably the most important factors for*

a good, happy marriage. Not that most people would know, since it's hardly ever talked about.

Todoroki truly felt that it was a pity. He felt even more strongly about it since it meant he wouldn't be able to have a good example he could follow throughout the entire length of his marriage of convenience with Bakugou. His parents' marriage was the last thing he wanted to bring in any form or shape into his fake relationship. That pretty much only left him with his older brother Natsuo's marriage, which wasn't that expansive of a sampling. Todoroki needed more than one good example to know how to navigate through this tricky marriage of convenience.

Or did he?

We've been doing things pretty randomly, or as we need to, so far, and it's been working pretty well, if I do say so myself, Todoroki pointed out to his own buttons as he peered sideways at the man sitting next to him. It took a certain amount of experience to be able to deal with Bakugou. He was very much not a beginner-friendly challenge, in all sorts of senses. Todoroki considered himself extremely lucky for having been successful with their unofficial mission so far, from being able to get Bakugou to accept his 'proposal' to deceiving the majority of people who were unaware of their true goals. *I still think we could use some solid examples of how to properly act as a couple who has supposedly been together for a few years now. Just because everyone on social media seems to have believed our lies, it doesn't mean we've convinced the people we are going after. Like my father. But maybe we don't actually need the example to come from a married couple, just from a good enough couple?*

When Todoroki tried that flirty move on Bakugou the previous night, he saw it bring out a pretty nice reaction from him. The inspiration for that kiss and nibbles to his fingers had come from the couple featured in yesterday's movie. A big majority of the people in the movie theater had gasped and squealed at it, which left a big enough impression on Todoroki for him to want to test it out. And, surprisingly, it worked just as intended, even if the only people who had seen it were the two

of them.

I know both the hand-holding and the cheek-pinching are big hits with social media. The kissing in public also has some very nice results with reporters and paparazzi, and it's a great way to silence my father too, Todoroki inwardly enumerated, doing his best to remember every single thing they had tried already to 'publicise' their 'relationship'. *I bet hugging or being all touchy-feely should be just as efficient as the other stuff, since it's kinda in line with it. Katsuki isn't a big fan of that overall, but I think he's slowly getting used to me being all over him, so long as I don't push it too far. Which I can't do to begin with whenever we're out in public. It was a big risk to kiss him like that at the aquarium, and we even got caught red-handed by another visitor. Sigh… That, too, is a pity. He looked so cute during and after that kiss…*

Correction: Bakugou was pretty cute almost half of the time they were together, but Todoroki found Bakugou to be particularly cuter at that moment. Thinking about it made him want to rewind time and start that kiss all over, this time in a way where no one would be able to spot the same adorable blush and pouty demeanour that he had been graced with.

He might look extra cute when I do that in public, but… Yeah, I need to keep things tamer from now on. I don't want to give Katsuki's crazy cult followers and other fans even more reasons why they should continue pestering him, declared Todoroki in the back of his mind, promising himself right there and then that he would be more careful with their PDA from now on. *I don't see why I shouldn't go all out when it's just the two of us, though. Katsuki even has given me his permission to continue having sex with him. Ah, speaking of which… It's probably time for another kiss. It's been a while since I've last done it.*

"Oh." Right as Todoroki started leaning his face closer to Bakugou, he came to a halt. Rather than raging crimson eyes glaring daggers at either him or the TV and a sulking expression that got his forehead and eyebrows all creased, what he saw was closed eyes framed by a serene face. In other words, Bakugou had fallen asleep. Todoroki breathed out a small whisper while carefully taking in the peaceful

expression on his ‘husband’. “That was fast. I don’t know how it compares to the movie, but it’s still pretty fast.”

They hadn’t been doing this ‘romance research’ for longer than an hour, and half of that time had been spent looking for something for them to watch. The possibility of Bakugou having raged-quit their late-night TV session by forcing himself to sleep was becoming more and more credible. Thanks to all the times they had shared a bed as of late, Todoroki was aware of how fast Bakugou was to conk out, but he had been under the impression it was because of all the intense ‘exercising’ they had been up to right before going to sleep. But maybe that was simply the way Bakugou and his unusual sleep patterns were.

“Well, I guess I’ve gotten the answer to one of my many questions,” Todoroki said under his breath, content that he could cross an item out of that ever-growing list. Now, he could move on to the next one: would Bakugou wake up all on his own at one point or another, or did he need some sort of external impetus to get up and wobble back to his bed?

Todoroki sort of already knew the answer to that, as he had seen it happen several times when they were living together with their former classmates at the dorm. On those rare nights when Kaminari and company managed to drag Bakugou out of his ‘cave’ and into the communal area to make him participate in their group activities, nine times out of ten, he would fall asleep midway through said activity. He also wouldn’t wake up for anything in this world, not even with all of their noisy antics. However, like clockwork, Bakugou would suddenly get up from the sofa at around the same time and silently go upstairs to his bedroom. Stopping that from happening was pretty much impossible, as he would immediately strike if anyone got in his way. With him being half-asleep, his hits didn’t pack as much of a punch as usual, but they could still be deadly if the other party wasn’t careful.

With them currently in a completely different setting, Todoroki wanted to find out if that same trend was about to repeat itself or if something else would happen.

Maybe twenty minutes after Todoroki had realised Bakugou had quietly fallen asleep, he noticed there was some slight wobbling unfolding. Very carefully, he redirected his ‘husband’s’ head so it would lean against him, much like it had happened at the movie theater. Their sitting positions were just a bit different compared to yesterday’s nap, so Todoroki had to adjust himself accordingly without being forced to let go of Bakugou’s waist or clothes. Just because he was asleep didn’t mean Todoroki would let his guard down.

He briefly took a glance at his smartphone to check the time and then waited while half-heartedly watching the TV show. It wasn't Bakugou's usual bedtime, despite him having fallen asleep seemingly ahead of schedule. To find out the next set of answers, Todoroki would have to be patient and bide his time. Fortunately, he had plenty to entertain himself with, like the TV and even his sleeping ‘spouse’.

With the lights being on, Todoroki could pretty much see every little thing, every detail and shadow on Bakugou’s face. He had to be very careful whenever he leaned closer to take a peek at him, as he didn’t want to accidentally cause his head to slip out of his shoulder, but with time being in his favour, he could be as slow and gentle about it as needed. After all, it wasn’t every day that one had front row seats to a sleeping beast, right? Kinda. Todoroki had seen it pretty frequently as of late, as he tended to fall asleep well after Bakugou whenever they ended up sharing a bed. But right now was different, wasn’t it? He had both the perfect lighting and an undisturbed view. How much better could it get?

Seeing him like this, I can’t help but sympathise with all of those guys from the HPS Commission telling Katsuki to smile some more, Todoroki chuckled in the back of his mind, a soft smile even popping out to say hello. Bakugou would look a whole lot less menacing and more approachable if he dropped his characteristic frown or even switched to his calm-serious mode more often. He could still be his strict, no-nonsense self while not striking fear in the hearts of those around him. It wasn’t as if other people wouldn’t take him seriously if he started

being just a little bit less demonic and slightly more human. If anything, that might even deal a huge blow to the delusional cult members who believed he was some sort of living god of death and destruction.

But, just like it had been previously mentioned, Todoroki was also okay with him staying the way he was. Being menacing and unapproachable didn't change the fact that Bakugou was a strong, proud pro hero with a brilliant future ahead of him. It even bugged him a little bit that they wouldn't be able to have a fair 'fight' against one another on the Hero Billboard because of all the reasons Bakugou had shared with him. Todoroki didn't want to win on a technicality or because those in the present refused to part with the 'old ways' as they all headed towards the future.

Oh, but if he did become less scary and more approachable, more people would end up realising how cute he can be, and that's a bit… Todoroki inwardly mumbled, his eyebrows shifting into a gentle upwards angle as his expressionless demeanour gained a bit of a sulky tone to it. Yes, Bakugou was more than okay the way he currently was, even with all the downsides to it. Todoroki was certain he would eventually find a way of leveling the field between them and make a fair 'fight' out of their pro hero careers. *Katsuki isn't one to bow down to anyone. He will definitely 'tame' the HPS Commission and start twisting them around his little finger to his benefit. With how fundamental he is to the country as a whole, I'd say that's a very fair trade.*

Plus, with how much Bakugou tended to attract the wrong crowd or how frequently he found himself in the eye of the storm, it was probably for the best if he didn't become *too* popular. He was already having a hard time dealing with the villain cult group as it was. Adding more to that was far too dangerous… or so Todoroki was rationalising why he did not want other people to see more of the gentler, cuter side of his 'husband'.

As Todoroki debated all of these things with himself, he felt some movement coming from right next to him once again. He felt that and the sudden absence of a light weight against his shoulder. Bakugou

had lifted his head from his temporary pillow and was now rubbing his sleepy eyes with the back of his hand.

Oh. I guess it's time, noted Todoroki to his own buttons. He didn't even need to take a glance at his smartphone to know that they had just hit Bakugou's bedtime. By the looks of it, that habit of just getting up and leaving for his bedroom was still in place. In all honesty, Todoroki was a little bit disappointed by it, as he didn't mind being used as a pillow by his napping 'spouse'. But he also wouldn't get in the way of his well-deserved rest. All Todoroki could do was reluctantly let go of his clothes and then silently watch as Bakugou leisurely got up from the sofa and began his wobbly walk to bed.

Or so it was supposed to happen.

Oh? Todoroki tilted his head with a certain curiosity as he saw Bakugou retrace the first step he had taken away from the sofa and pause. After standing completely still for a handful of seconds, he sat back down on the same spot as before. Had Bakugou had a change of heart or something about going to bed this early? Perhaps he was still waiting for Best Jeanist's report and, as such, was forcing himself to stay awake for as long as his body allowed him to? Todoroki wasn't entirely sure of the why, just that Bakugou had done so. *Well, I do know he can stay up until pretty late under some specific conditions, like when he's covering the graveyard shift or when we're doing it. He must have concluded that the report is more important than his strict sleep schedule, even while half-asleep.*

No one would hear a peep of complaint from Todoroki for that. He was more than happy to continue keeping Bakugou company until that report arrived. He even promptly switched back to the same position as before, and placed his arm around his 'husband's' waist while letting the side of his head lean against his shoulder. Bakugou also didn't seem to have any issues with it, with the way he fell right back asleep, his breathing rhythm calm and spaced.

“I think this is going to be another long night,” Todoroki softly chuckled to himself, turning the volume of the TV down just a little bit. He was going to enjoy every single minute of this long night, though. Being a pillow with a built-in cooling feature was an unorthodox way of spending one’s late evening, but it also sounded extremely cosy and maybe even wholesome.

Another thing that Todoroki had discovered as of late was that he *really* enjoyed snuggling up to Bakugou. It sounded totally crazy, with Bakugou being such a ticking time bomb, but it felt very nice and calming to him. Just like the hand-holding or the kissing, he would do it for hours on end if he could. And now that he had the opportunity to do so without Bakugou getting in his way, you can bet he was going to make the most out of it.

A comfortable sofa, endless entertainment from the TV, and a sleeping cutie being held in his arms. Could Todoroki’s night get any better than this?

Well, Todoroki quickly found that the answer to that question was a resounding yes.

Bakugou must have fallen asleep much more deeply this time around, as unlike before, he would shift his sitting position ever so slightly now and then. It wasn’t too noteworthy at first, just moving his head half an inch so the same spot on his cheek wouldn’t get too squished against Todoroki’s broad shoulder, or adjusting the positioning of his legs and feet. All for the sake of finding the sweet spot of sleeping in this sort of setting. But, as expected, sleeping while sitting wasn’t exactly the most comfortable or restful, and even fast-asleep Bakugou seemed to know that.

When Bakugou suddenly sat up straight a second time, Todoroki waited patiently for what he’d do next, extremely curious as to what sort of sleepy shenanigan would ensue. He was definitely not counting on his ‘husband’ dropping the entirety of his dead weight against him,

tackling him down directly on the sofa's cushions.

"K-Katsuki?" tentatively called Todoroki, the speed of his heartbeat spiking immensely from the suddenness of it all. He obtained no response whatsoever, just more spaced breaths coming from right above his stomach area, the spot that Bakugou had chosen as his new pillow. Even without that, a quick peek at his face confirmed that he was indeed sleeping like the dead, and possibly wasn't even aware of what he had just done. Todoroki sighed, his whispering voice coming out slightly tired. "Yeah, this is going to be a very long night for sure…"

There was a lot that Todoroki wanted to say about what had just happened, but for starters, he decided to take it in stride and adapt to it. His first move was to rescue his smartphone and the remote control from underneath him and then try his best to place them on the low table in front of the sofa. He did the same with Bakugou's smartphone, which he removed from his pants' pocket before it would slip out and be dropped somewhere.

Another thing he definitely didn't want to fall on the floor was Bakugou himself. The sofa was spacious enough to fit a couple of people next to one another while sitting. Lying down was a different story, though. The cushions weren't roomy enough to fit two adult men side by side, let alone men as tall and muscled as the two of them were. One wrong move and Bakugou would definitely suffer a nasty fall on the cold, hard floor. To avoid that dreadful scenario, Todoroki pulled himself slightly up while partially underneath Bakugou, just the bare minimum to lean the back of his head against the sofa's armrest rather than directly on the cushions. Then he wrapped his arms around Bakugou, took a good grip of his clothes, and pulled him up too, making sure to also adjust the position of their legs and place them on top of the sofa. Since there wasn't much space available, Todoroki had no choice but to keep Bakugou half on top of him, half on the sofa.

He stirred around a little bit now and then, but Bakugou didn't wake up in the slightest throughout the entire position change. After the

fact, though, he did do some adjustments of his own, sleepily seeking the optimal arrangement for himself. In the end, Bakugou's most comfortable sleeping position turned out to be sprawled on the sofa and on his 'husband', one of his arms hanging down the cushion, and with his face completely buried against Todoroki's chest.

Todoroki had some serious questions as to how exactly such a sleeping position came into being and why Bakugou had picked it as the ideal one, but well, it could be worse. He found it a little bit hard to breathe, due to all the weight right on top of his torso, but at least he hadn't been punched or kicked yet, like one too many of their former classmates had been in the past.

"Your sleeping habits really are weird," chuckled Todoroki, his voice soft and quiet as he carefully unstuck his arm from between his torso and the sofa's backrest. He gently placed his hand on top of the back of Bakugou's head, testing the waters with that initial brief pat. His 'husband' didn't so much as flinch or stir at it. Todoroki deemed that to mean that it was safe to continue.

Now that they had cosied up plentyfully, Todoroki could go back to watching whatever was on the TV, his fingers casually tangled in Bakugou's blonde locks as he mindlessly stroked his head. He felt very tempted to change the channel to something he'd enjoy more than random TV dramas that he had no context for, but he was a man of his word. The objective was to 'research' how couples acted so they could apply that knowledge while out in public, and that's exactly what Todoroki would do.

Not that Todoroki was learning any new information by watching these shows. It was all pretty basic stuff that he was already aware of. He might have had a sheltered upbringing, and he wasn't necessarily the most experienced person when it came to romance, but he wasn't completely ignorant to it either. He knew how couples behaved when together, for the most part. The only reason Todoroki was going along with this 'research' was because it sounded like fun - especially when it came to poking fun at Bakugou for having even thought of doing so in the first place.

Katsuki is so serious when it comes to work, officially or unofficially, noted Todoroki, deeply amused by the whole situation. Between the two of them, Bakugou should have been the more confident one when it came to pretending to be in a relationship, as he had a much better read on people in general than Todoroki did. And yet, he had been the one to come up with this idea, even if he had initially intended to do it alone. Todoroki so wanted to laugh at that, but he kept himself in check, not wanting to risk waking up his sleeping 'husband'.

"This is nice… I wish we could do this every night…" softly whispered Todoroki, his voice but a contented sigh. They were on vacation, so he was feeling in top shape right now. But relaxing like this after a tough day at work, while super tired and with his stress levels more elevated? That sounded like heaven on earth, in Todoroki's most humble opinion. The mere thought of it brought about a calming effect that he had never experienced before (though that might have been in part due to currently being engaged in it). "Maybe Katsuki was on to something when he said he wasn't my body pillow. Now the real question is how do I convince him into being one without him trying to kill me in the process…"

Todoroki brainstormed all sorts of ideas and plans, but none of them were fully satisfactory. All of them, one way or another, ended with him in mortal danger. The only plan that might temporarily work was to keep this whole thing a secret while continuing to nag his 'husband' for more late-night TV time together in the living room. That way, the moment Bakugou fell asleep, Todoroki would be able to enjoy some uninterrupted cuddling time with the most relaxing human 'body pillow' in the world.

The only problem with that was, obviously, the possibility of getting caught red-handed doing it. Bakugou was so good at figuring stuff out, and Todoroki was such a bad liar - that was the worst combo ever when it came to stuff like this. The likelihood of him being found out at some point was terrifyingly high… Plus, Todoroki had yet to figure out the triggers to get Bakugou to wake up. He was currently sleeping like the dead, and even moving him around didn't arouse him from

his slumber. But at the same time, Bakugou still seemed to be somewhat aware of his surroundings, the way he adjusted himself according to his own comfort and needs. Who was to say that a single louder noise or even the ringing of a phone wouldn't immediately wake him up, only for him to find himself being used by Todoroki as a body pillow without his explicit permission?

Ah. Wouldn't that mean that I'm in a pretty dangerous situation right now…? Todoroki suddenly realised, perhaps a bit too belatedly. Bakugou was probably only still there because he was waiting for Best Jeanist's report. The moment his phone rang or even beeped, he was certain to wake up to receive said report. And the moment that happened, Todoroki would probably be sent straight to the dog house yet again… *Crap. What time is it?*

Hand still snugly pressed against the back of Bakugou's head, Todoroki had to do his utmost to somehow reach his smartphone, which was on top of the nearby low table, with his free one. Once he grabbed it, he immediately checked the time and then unlocked the screen. It was now well past Bakugou's usual bedtime. By a lot. Todoroki wasn't entirely sure whether Best Jeanist was aware of his younger coworker's sleep schedule or not, but he also didn't want to risk any deadly surprises.

He preemptively made a phone call to avoid the worst-possible scenario during his relaxation time.

"Hello?" said Best Jeanist, having answered after only a few rings. *"You're quite the unusual caller, Shouto."*

"I'm sorry for bothering you at such a late hour," Todoroki began, keeping his voice as low as possible while still being easily heard by the receiver of his phone call. "Dynamight asked you to check something for him earlier this morning, didn't he?"

“Yes, he did,” acknowledged Best Jeanist without missing a beat. *“Has something else happened since then? Or have you come across more information that might aid me with his request?”*

“No, not exactly…” replied Todoroki, a bit uncertain how to explain his current predicament to the other pro hero. He paused for a while to gather his thoughts, and then sighed. “To be frank with you, Dynamight has already fallen asleep, and I need him to stay that way, or I will be in some serious trouble. If you could give me the report, I’d really appreciate it. I’ll fill him in with all the details about it tomorrow morning.”

“Yes, I figured as much,” chuckled Best Jeanist. He wasn’t sure what Todoroki meant by, ‘or he will be in some serious trouble’, but it did sound just right when it was being said in association with Bakugou. *“That’s why I was planning on only calling him tomorrow. But since you’ve done half of the work for me, I’ll give you my findings so far.”*

“Oh. Okay.” It seemed that Todoroki had been in the clear, after all. He was still glad he had played it safe and made this phone call, though. Now, he wouldn’t have any worries in the back of his mind, and could enjoy the calming cuddling to its full potential. “Was I actually right to think that band of thieves is involved with the villain cult group that wants to recruit Dynamight?”

“To be honest, we still don’t know,” sighed Best Jeanist, the sound of rustling papers coming from his end of the line. *“The detectives that interrogated all four of them told me they were hired to steal those goods. They weren’t even aware of what it was they were stealing at first, if you can believe it. They were simply given a location, time, and a brief description of what the goods looked like shortly before the heist took place. As for who hired them… That’s what the detectives are trying to figure out. The person or group who wanted those research-grade computers wasn’t the one who was in contact with the thieves. They used an intermediary for all communication.”*

“How smart of them…” commented Todoroki, a small frown appearing on his usually expressionless face. That was as good as an unofficial confirmation that the villain cult group was indeed the true culprit for that unsuccessful heist. With their current track record and how good they were at what they did, it was simply a given. Whether it was a coincidence that Bakugou ended up being the one catching them or if that, too, was part of their plan, Todoroki wasn’t as sure of…

“The detectives are now looking into that intermediary, but it will probably take a while until we know who they are, let alone the true source for the job they were hired to do,” said Best Jeanist. *“I’m sure that’s not the kind of answer you or Dynamight wanted to hear, but that’s all I have as of right now. I doubt much will be done during the weekend, so the soonest you’ll hear back about this case will be next week.”*

“I see. Thank you for going out of your way to check all of this for us,” sighed Todoroki, indeed fairly disappointed they ended up with so little information. He could already see Bakugou kicking up a fuss about it the moment he told him about it. “I know you must be busy with all sorts of other more pressing cases and your regular duties around the city, especially with both of us gone at the same time.”

“It’s no problem, really. It might be an unofficial mission for the time being, but I’m quite worried about the whole situation,” confessed Best Jeanist, his voice sounding just a smidge tired. *“I’ve talked about it with Dynamight several times and tried to convince him to put in a request for a formal investigation by providing the HPS Commission with all the information he has gathered so far. But he’s being weirdly stubborn about the whole thing, saying that he can take care of it on his own. I suspect he has yet to tell us the whole truth about that villain cult group or the real reason why he wants to keep its investigation and arrest as just an unofficial mission.”*

“.....” It was quite validating to hear someone else say the exact same thing that had sporadically crossed Todoroki’s mind whenever he was thinking about Bakugou’s side of their deal. He had always been a bit of a lone wolf, preferring to do things his way rather than

relying on teamwork. But Bakugou had become slightly more open to cooperation with other pro heroes and sidekicks as time went on, to the point he was now well-known for his 100% success rate whenever he was commanding a mission.

His suddenly doing a total 180 on that with this one particular case was extremely strange and even slightly worrying. Bakugou didn't do anything without a reason. If he had decided that the best route to resolve this case was to do things solo (for the most part), there had to be a crucial motive behind it. However, Bakugou also refused to reveal what that motive was, even keeping it hidden from the few people who knew about their unofficial mission. Unfortunately, Todoroki was no exception to that, despite clear, open communication being fundamental to the success of their plans.

"Given your sudden silence, I can tell that you also aren't in the know," sighed Best Jeanist, coming across as quite vexed about this topic. There was nothing he could do about it, though. *"Dynamight is a tough, durable pair of jeans, but even the best of denim has its limit. Be sure to keep an eye out for him and stop him if he overworks himself too much or bites more than he can chew. It might just be a temporary marriage of convenience, but you are legally his spouse. That makes you the only person capable of actually keeping a tight leash on him at the moment."*

"You have nothing to worry about. He's still getting his beauty sleep with no further issues, despite all that has been happening," deadpanned Todoroki, adjusting his head somewhat so he could glance down at his sleeping 'husband'. "Plus, he's quite good at managing his own physical condition and looking after himself."

"It's not his physical condition that I worry about," scoffed Best Jeanist, leaving the actual source of his concerns unsaid but still heavily implied. *"But yes, you're right. He does know how to look after himself pretty nicely. Maybe a bit too nicely, even. Everyone needs to crash and burn now and then, or true growth can never be achieved. Then again, with how radically his living environment has changed, maybe this unofficial mission setting isn't that bad of a thing for him, in the great scheme of things. I'm extremely curious as to how everything will turn out for the two*

of you."

"If you're wondering how things are going so far, then everything has been going according to plan," said Todoroki, a bit confused about what Best Jeanist was talking about. "Neither of us has been experiencing any issues or difficulties adjusting to this mission. We're even ahead of schedule with quite a lot of things, which means we'll actually be able to use some of our vacation days as a proper vacation."

"Well, I'll be damned. That's something I definitely was not counting on hearing!" interjected Best Jeanist, wholeheartedly surprised by that piece of information. *"I thought that after a week of being 'married' and a few days of living together, you two would be ready to go to war on each other. I suppose you actually do have a shot at making this unofficial mission work after all. You can ignore what I said earlier. Continue what you're doing and don't involve anyone else in it. If you got Dynamight to use his vacation days as intended, you're all the backup he needs."*

I'm starting to get the feeling that quite a lot of people have a very skewed perception of both Katsuki and our unofficial mission, Todoroki deadpanned in the back of his mind, his hand resuming the gentle stroking to the back of Bakugou's head without him even noticing. He wasn't going to be the one who corrected those skewed perceptions, however.

For starters, it sounded like too much of a chore, and since it had no discernible impact on them, it was not worth the struggle. Also, if he did do it, he'd see no end to it, having to repeat himself again and again with each instance. That, too, was too much of a bother. Then, last but definitely not least, it suited Todoroki just fine that everyone - their friends, coworkers, and acquaintances included - thought of Bakugou as this moody gremlin who wreaked havoc everywhere he went, instead of the perfect spouse that he actually was.

"Anyhow, I still have some loose threads I need to take care of before I can

finish work, so if you don't have anything else you want to ask, I'll be taking my leave now," said Best Jeanist, extremely satisfied with how things were going after all. *"I'm sure I'll hear his complaints about it from the man himself tomorrow, but give my best regards to Dynamight once you talk with him."*

"Yeah, I will," Todoroki reassured, not wanting to keep Best Jeanist away from his work any longer than he already had. After a quick goodbye, he ended the call and set his smartphone back on the low table. He sighed, "Well, I guess that's it."

There was no longer any reason for Bakugou to continue sleeping on the sofa in the living room, and Todoroki had also watched a good enough amount of TV shows for the night. Now was a great time for both of them to officially end their day.

So then why didn't Todoroki want to move an inch from where he was?

The answer was pretty obvious, even to Todoroki himself. He still hadn't had enough of sleeping Bakugou cuddling time.

"Katsuki seems to be sleeping really nicely, so…" whispered Todoroki, his words trailing off at the end as he tried to take a peek at the little that he could see of his sleeping face. Weird position aside, his 'husband' looked like he was having the best sleep of his entire life. Todoroki definitely did not want to get in the way of that, especially after all the warnings and threats he had received earlier that day. "Since I can't mess up his sleep schedule from now on, I guess there's no helping it."

Todoroki would gladly be squashed the whole night if it meant he could continue using Bakugou as the best body pillow in the universe or that he wouldn't have to deal with a moody, sleep-deprived

‘husband’ the following morning.

Deep down, however, he was simply being his true selfish self and doing whatever he wanted. Because he liked this. Todoroki truly, sincerely liked this and did not want it to end - now or after the conclusion of their unofficial mission.

Chapter 63

“Nngh… Why the hell… is it so bright today…?” mumbled Bakugou, sleepiness making his voice lower and slower than usual. He was one to wake around the same early hour in the morning, unless there were external factors making him sleep for longer. This morning, he was facing exactly that scenario, but in the reverse direction - he was waking up earlier than he usually did, all due to the intense brightness of his surroundings.

In his former apartment, he always made sure to close his blackout curtains before going to bed, and in this current one, his bedroom didn’t have a window to begin with. Unless his ceiling light had suddenly decided to go supernova - extremely doubtful -, there was no reason as to why he was being woken up by such an extreme amount of light.

Very slowly, Bakugou moved his arm from its sleeping position and tiredly rubbed his still-closed eyes. He then turned his head to the side while leaning it back down on the ‘pillow’. The first thing he saw upon opening his eyes was the wooden tone of the living room’s low table, which had his smartphone and a few other things on top of it.

“...Huh?” gasped Bakugou, vacantly staring at that unusual sight as his brain fully booted up and finished processing his visuals. When he lifted his head again and turned it some more, his crimson eyes were greeted by the glorious early rising of the summer sun - the true source of all that brightness. The large, east-facing ceiling-to-floor windows that they had in the living room still didn’t have any curtains, as they hadn’t gotten around to purchasing ones with the right size and attachments. Hence, for the time being, there was no way to shield the living room from the intense sunbeams in the morning. Taking all of that sunlight straight into his eyeballs jolted Bakugou into full wakefulness fairly fast. “...What the heck? Why am I slee…ping……”

As Bakugou tried to figure out just what exactly was going on and why he had woken up on the sofa rather than in his bed, he returned his lying-down position to its initial form. That was when he spotted yet another shocking oddity: this time being what - or more accurately, who - he was using as his pillow and half of his mattress.

Seriously, what the fuck? Bakugou interjected in the back of his mind, shaken to his very core. It was one thing to wake up next to Todoroki after sharing a bed for the majority of the night. It was another to wake up *on top* of Todoroki after, apparently, using him as a bed for the majority of the night. Bakugou carefully adjusted his position, keeping his movements to a bare minimum and as light and nimble as possible, so he could massage his temple with the pads of his fingers. *How exactly did watching those crappy TV dramas turn into… whatever the hell this is?*

That was the sort of mystery that Bakugou was not mentally equipped to solve. It was far too stupid a thing for him to waste his brain power on, and he had no patience or fucks to give for it either. The only thing that mattered to him was why it had happened to begin with and how to avoid letting it happen a second time.

He recapitulated what he remembered of the previous night. Since he was waiting for Best Jeanist's report, Bakugou consented to sticking around the living room to do some additional research for their mission by watching some dumb TV shows. That was it. That was as far as his memories of last night went. Which meant he had definitely fallen asleep once again while watching those boring TV dramas, whether it was because he had hit his usual bedtime or because they were that bad and made him mentally withdraw into an early sleep.

But all of that was purely an explanation on Bakugou's side of the story. He had no idea why Todoroki let any of it happen. If Bakugou had fallen asleep midway through their 'research', wouldn't any sane person have ended the TV watching spree and gotten the sleeping one to bed? Or at the very least, Todoroki could have woken him up and told him to go sleep in his bedroom rather than the living room. And that was just to name a few options that his 'husband' could have

gone for last night.

I'm being serious when I say that he needs to get his head checked at the hospital. There's clearly something broken inside of his brain…, sighed Bakugou to his own buttons, closely observing Todoroki's dumb-looking sleeping face. He also had no idea how exactly his 'spouse' could sleep *under* these circumstances (no pun intended). Roughing it out on the sofa with a man just as tall and heavy on top of you couldn't be comfortable by any metric. To a certain extent, the fact that Todoroki could sleep this peacefully despite that made Bakugou want to crack the code behind his dense, crazy brain once and for all. *Tsk… And I'm no better, sleeping the whole night like this with him as my bed… This guy must have zero pride to let himself be used like this. Argh, and again, I'm not better for letting it happen to begin with! Damn it! I'm so gonna kill him for this!*

Bakugou was ready to throw his first hissy fit of the day by pinching Todoroki's nose and lightly suffocating him while he slept. But he came to a halt just as his fingers were about to take hold of his neatly sculptured nose.

The reason why it was so bright outside even though it was so early in the morning was that they were in August, the very apogee of summertime in Japan. That meant that the nights never had enough hours of darkness to drop below a humid warm. Then, the sunrise that came at its earliest at half past four in the morning made the temperature steadily rise from there on out until it was sizzling hot and as stuffy as a freaking sauna. Given the angle of the sun and the sunlight pouring inside the living room, it was probably around 5 AM right now, give or take an hour earlier than Bakugou's usual wake-up time.

Despite that, Bakugou was extremely well rested. He also wasn't waking up drenched in sweat, even after cosing up to Todoroki in such a tight location throughout the entire night.

Did he… keep his Quirk activated this whole time? Bakugou asked himself in the back of his mind. Not that he needed to, as the answer was evident. Half of the body underneath him was at just the right temperature to be nice to cuddle with, without ever reaching an unpleasant coolness. It wasn't an exaggeration to say that Todoroki had fully mastered the art of being a human-shaped AC, even if he had clumsy control over his Quirk at times. Bakugou lowered his hand, placing it on top of Todoroki's softly inflating and deflating chest once again. He grumbled, a blushing pout scrunching up his face. "...You really are such a pain in the ass… At least let me slap you awake as payback…"

That half-hearted grumbled threat remained as just that - a grumbled threat. Bakugou couldn't bring himself to be that petty when there was so much going for Todoroki. He might hate the outcome, but he couldn't take it out on the underlying kindness behind it.

If you were just about anyone else, someone would be planning your funeral right about now…, scoffed Bakugou, his inner voice as haughty and authoritative as if he had said that sentence out loud. Once again, he was about to get up so he could officially get his day started - which included finally getting some exercising and training done and beginning to cook breakfast - when he came to yet another halt. *Wait… If he were anyone else, I'd kill him? Why the hell should I give him a free pass from an early grave just because he's the one and only Half-and-Half Bastard?*

Yes, exactly. Why was Bakugou making an exception for Todoroki? Why was he setting this one person apart from everyone else completely unprompted? He wouldn't give a free pass to his literal best friend; why was he doing so to this moron he just so happened to 'marry' due to circumstances?

"Tsk… His lack of brain cells and craziness must be contagious or something… I better be more careful from now on…" That was Bakugou's takeaway from those previous questions, the poor fool. Lack of awareness was an even worse sin than a lack of brain cells or craziness, but of course he remained unaware of that too. Go figure…

Satisfied with that very lukewarm conclusion, Bakugou finally resumed what he had started and got up from the sofa and his temporary human cooler. He was still feeling very tempted to take some of his annoyance out on Todoroki and his frustratingly peaceful sleeping face - to keep that from happening, he walked up to his bedroom without sparing him a single glance more and went about the start of his day as usual.

Not even 20 minutes later, Bakugou was by the front door putting on his running shoes. It wasn't waking up an hour earlier than planned that would put a damper on his schedule for the day. If anything, it would make scouting the area around his new address much easier, as well as give him a break from being chased around and stared at by any nearby fans or reporters.

I went that way last time, so I guess I should go this way this morning, noted Bakugou in the back of his mind, inwardly reviewing the pieces of the mental map he was in the process of creating. Once he set a beginning point, he immediately got down to business and started jogging in the direction he had picked. From there on out, he carefully picked each turn and change of direction, using his new apartment complex as the central location while slowly expanding across its radius.

It was already quite hot outside, but an occasional cool breeze brought about the ideal conditions for jogging in the early morning. The fact that it was basically just him and some occasional passersby out there made it even better. He could run to his heart's content without any distractions or getting stopped halfway through his daily dose of exercising. That peacefulness probably came from the fact that the direction he had picked was mostly a residential area, with just some occasional mom-and-pop stores and restaurants in between.

Bakugou would bet that those streets would get busier in a matter of hours, as both students and workers started their commutes to school and work, respectively. But for now, they basically belonged to him

exclusively.

That was yet another reason as to why Bakugou was so quick at noticing when someone did appear around his surroundings.

Clad in a black blouse and long skirt that covered her legs down to her ankles and wearing dark sunglasses that obscured half of her pale face, a woman was leisurely walking down the same street as Bakugou was jogging on. One would think of this sort of get-up as unusual and very suspicious, but the large bouquet of white chrysanthemums, carnations, and lilies that she held in her arms could serve as a good explanation for such a bleak sight. She was simply a young woman in mourning, perhaps having left her home extra early to begin a long trip to the grave or maybe even the funeral of a dearly departed family member or beloved.

Bakugou wouldn't have paid her any mind aside from a small glance had she not stopped in the middle of the street, directly in front of the path that he was taking, and then briefly bowed at him. Such an odd act went over suspicious and bordered on threatening under his current circumstances. He reduced his jogging speed and approached the woman a whole lot more cautiously.

"Good morning, Dynamight-sama," greeted the woman, her voice light and airy as she gracefully straightened her body from the previous bowing position. She warmly smiled at the pro hero, housing in her face the kind of expression that a gentle older sister would have while speaking to her dear younger brother. "I hope I have not disturbed you while you are so diligently training. I always feel a fond surge of pride whenever I see you give it your best so early in the morning. It's truly an inspiring sight to all of us."

There was no deceiving Bakugou's keen intuition, however. Even without a clear view of her face - and specifically her eyes -, he could still see the crazy in her. He saw the madness leaking out of her adoring gaze, and the sickly-sweet stench of obsession permeating her

very voice and tender words.

She was making herself come across as one more of his fans. But what was lying underneath that thin veneer of idolatry was a confession of constantly keeping an uncomfortably close eye on Bakugou, whether he was on his working hours or not.

There was no doubt in his mind that she was one of the members of the villain cult group that worshipped Great Explosion Murder God Dynamight as a literal living god.

Makes sense. I already knew the next one would be a chick, given their visiting patterns to date, sighed Bakugou in the back of his mind, choosing to keep his silence rather than entertain their delusions with some casual chitchatting.

“I know it isn’t much, but I’d like to personally give you a little offering,” said the woman, gesturing the bouquet towards Bakugou with both of her hands. She once again performed a very subservient and respectful bow, which made her ‘offering’ remark even creepier. In a way, she did come across as a fervent believer making a ritualistic offer to the god she worshipped, either as a thank-you gift for prior instances or as a prayer to be answered in the future.

“I don’t accept gifts from any fans, much less from you guys,” Bakugou coldly refused, not mincing his words as he gave the woman a resounding ‘no’. She wasn’t breaking any laws, and she wasn’t causing a disturbance either, which meant he didn’t have any grounds to arrest her on the spot. It wasn’t illegal to be a delusional creep either, unfortunately. All in all, Bakugou had no reason why he should keep going along with her ‘visit’. He left that more than clear by adjusting his earphones and readying himself to continue with his jogging.

“Believe me, you will want to accept my offering this time.”

“…!” What made Bakugou change his plans and stay rooted in place wasn’t those words per se, but the tone of her voice. The sickly-sweet, sisterly cadence had vanished, and the only bones that were left behind in its wake were a sinister coldness.

“Okay?” said the woman, once again warmly smiling at Bakugou while motioning the bouquet closer to him.

“I have no idea what you guys have been scheming these past few days, but you better quit it while you still have a chance,” warned Bakugou, a serious frown spreading the animosity he felt all over his face. Despite wanting nothing more than to stay clear of that loony woman and her ‘offering’, he still grabbed and then yanked the bouquet off her hands, scattering white petals all around them with that forceful movement. “A ‘no’ means ‘no’, no matter how much you pester and harass me. I ain’t joining your little villain group and I ain’t gonna become the god of murder and death you want me to be. For as good as I might be at everything I do, I’m still nothing more than a human who has literally just gotten married, in case you have been living under a fuckin’ rock this past week.”

“Yes, such auspicious news those were,” remarked the woman, an extremely cheerful smile blossoming on her lips as she happily chattered in pure adoration. “We have been rooting for you two for a long, long time now. It’s great to be able to see it come to fruition with my own two eyes. And imagine, Shouto of all people! As expected, you truly do have a keen nose when it comes to picking other people, Dynamight-sama! To conquer such a strong pro hero and bring him into our cabal… Yes, yes, you have all the makings of godly greatness!”

“……..Huh?” Bakugou interjected, his frown softening and getting replaced by an utterly confounded expression. That was… *not* the kind of reaction he was expecting out of his ‘worshippers’. The words were

as delusional and nonsensical as ever, but it was being overblown in a direction that Bakugou had not even once accounted for.

"Oh my! I've been keeping you stuck here for so long already!" gasped the woman, worriedly looking around their surroundings as if she had only now noticed they had been talking in the middle of the street this whole time. She once again bowed at the pro hero, this time in apology. "I'm truly sorry for having interrupted your training, Dynamight-sama. Please, don't mind me and feel free to keep going. I will continue silently cheering you on from a distance. Like I *always* do. I hope you have a good rest of the day and enjoy the remainder of your honeymoon to its fullest, our beloved murder god."

After one last bow, the woman gracefully took her leave and continued walking down the street, moving in the same direction where Bakugou had come from.

"...What the hell was she going on about…?" Bakugou mumbled under his breath after the woman had completely vanished from sight. He could no longer sense her presence either, but if he were to trust her words, she was definitely still somewhere close by, continuing her silent surveillance on him. But that was besides the point.

The villain cult group thought of Bakugou's 'marriage' to Todoroki as 'good news'? And they've been rooting for them for a long time now? What was that even supposed to mean? That whole soliloquy had left Bakugou more confused than during all of the other conversations and interrogations he had had with the already arrested members.

To make it worse, it seemed they were conveniently interpreting their 'marriage' as Bakugou having 'recruited' Todoroki as another member to 'their' villain cult group. That was quite literally the opposite of what both of them had intended. It was also very alarming, as it could very well mean that the cult members would now also start harassing Todoroki.

No, the chances of that are pretty low… I think, noted Bakugou to his own buttons, initiating his return to his apartment while visually inspecting the bouquet. He did not want to bring any nasty 'surprises' home with him, even if they were probably already aware of where he lived and didn't need to resort to sneaky tactics to find out that information. *The level of respect and idolatry they show for him is completely different. They most likely think of him as one more member of their cult. He just so happens to be someone who contributes to that whole 'murder god worshipping' in a completely different way, since he gets to interact with me every day and we even live together.*

In a roundabout way, that was a good thing. It would become a huge problem if the cult members started acting all possessive over their 'murder god' and tried to get rid of Todoroki through one more of their crazy plans. Bakugou knew that Todoroki could easily deal with them without breaking a sweat, but it would still complicate their unofficial mission needlessly. It might be baffling and beyond delusional, but it was far better that they 'accepted' him as a member of their 'cabal', as that woman had called it.

Now the most important thing is to figure out why she was so insistent on me accepting her 'offering' and find out once and for all what exactly they are planning next… Bakugou concluded in the back of his mind, twice as eager to return home. The rest of his daily training would have to be postponed to a later time. He had work to do, unofficially as it might be. *The next one to pay me a lil' 'visit' will be some dude for sure. And he will definitely be starting some shit while at it. It seems it's finally time for me to wipe the floor with someone's ugly face and to chip away at their numbers some more. I can't wait to fuck up their plans again, hehehe.*

Chapter 64

“Hey, wake up.”

“Oh.” That morning, Todoroki was woken up by that moody order and the strong shaking of the sofa underneath him, which had very obviously been caused by a kick. He promptly opened his eyes with a startle and looked up with a still sleepy gaze, only to be greeted by, of course, Bakugou’s frowning face. Todoroki silently stared at him for what felt like a very long time, wondering to himself why exactly his ’husband’ was standing there holding a bouquet of white flowers and not sleeping on top of him all cutely.

“I woke up ages ago, if that’s what you’re wondering,” sighed Bakugou, not even needing to be a proper mindreader to know what was currently crossing his ‘husband’s’ brain at the moment. His gaze tightened while he uttered his next words with a very venomous, strict tone. “All because a certain someone got me to sleep in a place with huge windows and no curtains.”

Curtain shopping coming right up, then, noted Todoroki in the back of his mind, adding that entry to his list of tasks for this weekend, or better yet, the final days of their vacation. That, however, had only answered half of his questions. “What are the flowers for?”

“Oh, these?” said Bakugou, glancing down at the bouquet with a certain disdain. He didn’t even bother to be careful with the flowers as he dropped the bouquet on the low table next to the sofa, scattering some white petals on the floor in the process. “They’re an ‘offering’ from the lunatics.”

“Eh?” Todoroki, this time, jolted into a sitting position, getting fully awake by the severity and implication of those words. He switched his expressionless yet flabbergasted stare back and forth between his

‘spouse’ and the bouquet, which now looked more like a ticking time bomb to him than a flower arrangement. “What happened? Did they come to deliver them to our new address or…?”

“Nah, they’re not that bold,” scoffed Bakugou while rolling his eyes at that very good assumption. “I bumped into one of them while I was outside jogging. And when I say ‘bumped’, I mean that creepy chick must have been following us around from a distance this whole time. I don’t even have a proper jogging route yet, but she still managed to pay me a little visit this easily. But honestly, they probably already know where we live too. She decided to give this ‘offering’ to me in person because, one, of course they are that delusional and obsessive, and two, dropping it off in a place with so many security cameras or through a shipping service would leave behind a trail. The place she picked to make contact with me was a random residential street with no stores with video surveillance or other crime prevention cameras around.”

“Oh. That explains why you were at a place like that last week too,” said Todoroki, once again thinking back on the cult group member he had seen being arrested by Bakugou a while ago. Back then, they were also quite out of the way, in a more sheltered area of the city. “Did you also arrest that woman and give her to the police?”

“Why would I? It’s not like she was creating a commotion or acting all crazy. Well… the type of crazy that gets people arrested, at least,” sighed Bakugou with a quick shrug of his shoulders. “Unfortunately, it’s not illegal to be a total creep, and stalking laws are worth jackshit around here. If those two things actually worked properly in this god-damned country, Izuku would have a pretty chunky criminal record right about now…”

I see that Midoriya keeps on catching strays even when the topic has absolutely nothing to do with him, deadpanned Todoroki in the back of his mind. Technically speaking, there was sort of a connection with that friend of theirs, but only because Bakugou was deadset in perceiving him as a wannabe stalker of some sort, even now. “I see… So you couldn’t find a reason to do away with one more member of

the cult… What a pity."

"You can say that again," groaned Bakugou, rolling his eyes around in annoyance at that extremely frustrating fact. He dropped his body on the sofa next to Todoroki, his arms already crossed over his chest. "I kinda wish they had made a more decisive move. I'm so in the mood to bring someone to the brink of meeting their maker… But unfortunately, I can't wipe the floor with someone's face because of a stupid, creepy bouquet…"

"It is kinda in theme with their whole 'murder god' shtick, though," pointed out Todoroki, closely observing the bouquet from a distance. It was a flower arrangement made of white chrysanthemums, carnations, and lilies, all flowers typically found in the bouquets used during funerals and as offerings to the family of the deceased. Todoroki wasn't all that knowledgeable about flowers or their special meanings, but he had attended enough funerals already to be aware of the usual procedures. "Funeral flowers to a murder god, huh… Seeing as you're an active pro hero, it's a pretty distasteful gift."

"It's creepy as fuck, you mean," scoffed Bakugou, a disgusted look on his face as he too glanced at the bouquet. "I wouldn't have touched that crap with a ten-foot pole if I could have helped it. But she was being pretty stubborn about it, claiming that it would be in my benefit to accept her 'offering', in a roundabout way."

"Why? Is there something special or meaningful about it?" asked Todoroki, leaning closer to the bouquet to inspect it better. "Are they hiding something in it? A message to you, maybe?"

"It's possible," confirmed Bakugou with a leisurely shrug of his shoulders. "I know there's nothing nasty in there, or I would have taken it straight to the closest police station rather than home. It's 100% clear of tracking devices or listening bugs, at the very least. But that's as far as I checked for now."

“Hmm… Yeah, I’m curious about any hidden messages, but it would probably be safer if we have it analysed by someone more knowledgeable about this stuff first,” said Todoroki, leaning back on the sofa again. “We have no idea if they did something to the flowers themselves, like using some sort of harmful chemical or maybe even some niche Quirk that can be activated under a specific set of conditions.”

“My thoughts exactly,” snorted Bakugou, pleased that they seemed to be on the same page about this. He might have carried the bouquet all the way home, but he made sure to only touch the plastic wrapping around the stems, never actually coming into contact with the flowers themselves. The villain cult group might worship him like a god, but Bakugou wouldn’t put it past them to attempt to bring him even closer to so-called ‘godhood of death’ through poison or some sort of simulated near-death experience. “Guess I’m about to create even more work for Jeanist. He can kiss goodbye to a calm weekend, hah.”

“Oh. Speaking of which,” Todoroki abruptly started, the mention of the pro hero reminding him that he had a certain message to deliver. “I talked with Best Jeanist last night.”

“WHAT!?” yelped Bakugou, going from calm and relaxed to fuming mad in a fraction of a second. “Why didn’t you say something sooner!? No, wait! Why the hell didn’t you wake me up while you were talking to him!? I was literally on top of you the entire night!!!”

“Ah… You were being too cute so I just…” explained Todoroki in a pretty half-hearted way, if he did say so himself. The true reason was that waking him up would mean that their cuddling would come to a premature end. And so did Bakugou finally getting the report that had made him stay in the living room to begin with. As such, Todoroki made the unilateral decision to just not wake him up. *He did look super cute throughout the whole night, though, even if I couldn’t really see his face much. Then again, the mere fact that he had his face buried against me the whole time was pure cuteness in itself.*

“Stop calling me cute!!!!!!!” hissed Bakugou, kicking his ‘husband’s’ leg a handful of times as part of his hissy fit. “Also, stop making me change the subject! What did Jeanist say? What’s his report!?”

“To sum it up, that matter is still under investigation,” said Todoroki, making his words so brief and to the point that he forced Bakugou into roaring ‘You’re summing it up too much, you half-assed moron!’ at the top of his lungs. He sighed and kept going, this time in more detail. “The detectives working on that case have already interrogated all four thieves, and they’ve concluded that Midoriya was sort of right about his theory on the dark part-time jobs. They got hired through some sort of proxy to steal the research-grade computers. They weren’t even informed about what the job entailed until it was about to go down, according to what Best Jeanist told me. As for who was the proxy and the actual source of the job request, that’s the part still being investigated. But with it being the weekend, we’ll probably only learn more about that next week. If we’re lucky, that is.”

“Tsk… What a bunch of morons, accepting to do such a dumb, shady job…” grumbled Bakugou, twice as moody after getting his childhood friend’s suspicions confirmed. He was definitely not happy about it, and he was definitely not going to be the one who told Midoriya that he had sort of hit the jackpot with that one. “I kinda expected the report to be extremely brief, though. That crappy heist of theirs only happened two days ago, and with it being so close to the weekend, of course it’s gonna be a slow process. The only saving grace is that they seem to be on a good path to figure all of that shit out, so I can’t complain much…”

“Yeah, I’m sure you’ll hear more about that investigation before the end of next week,” reassured Todoroki, even though he didn’t have much to back him up. “Whether the next report on that case is of any help to our unofficial mission or not is the big question.”

“At this point, I wouldn’t be surprised by anything,” sighed Bakugou, fully aware of how bad his luck was when it came to stuff like this.

“Well, for now, let’s deal with what we can do. Which means, we’re focusing on these creepy flowers first and foremost!”

“Ok-”

“After we have some breakfast, that is,” Bakugou interrupted, promptly getting up from the sofa and making a beeline to the kitchen. “They’ve disturbed my training schedule already. They ain’t about to ruin my cooking either!”

Sometimes, he’s petty in such amusing ways, Todoroki chuckled in the back of his mind, a small smile breaching into his face as he watched Bakugou make his way to his main domain in the apartment. Once he became a bit more accustomed to that warm feeling in his chest, however, he also immediately jumped out of the sofa, as if he had just remembered something.

Yes, Todoroki was almost about to overlook something very important. He rushed to the kitchen like his life depended on it and removed the frying pan from Bakugou’s hands.

“‘The heck? What is it now?” grumbled Bakugou, really not in the mood for whatever crazy antics were going through his ‘husband’s’ silly brain right now.

“Don’t start cooking just yet,” requested Todoroki, putting down the frying pan on the counter. “Give me 10, no, 15 minutes, and then you can start.”

“Don’t wanna,” said Bakugou as he grabbed the frying pan once again and took it to the stove. “I’m also not gonna let *you* get in the way, just because you can’t plan ahead. Besides, aren’t you almost always asleep whenever I’m cooking breakfast?”

“But I’m awake today,” pointed out Todoroki, following his ‘husband’ so he could once again pick up the frying pan and remove it from the stove. “It’s just a couple of minutes. It can’t even be considered a delay.”

“No,” replied Bakugou, leaving the ‘and that’s final’ unsaid but very much implied in his frowning face.

“.....” For as bad as Todoroki might have been at reading social cues, he knew Bakugou well enough to know what that ‘no’ meant. As such, he did what any sensible person would have done had they been in his shoes…

He made a break for it, along with the pan.

“Ah! Hey! Get back here!” yelled Bakugou, with only a second-long delay after that initial gasp. He didn’t think twice about starting to chase after Todoroki, even though he had plenty of other frying pans that he could use. It wasn’t that the frying pan that had just been ‘kidnapped’ was special or his favourite; it was simply a matter of principle. “Gimme that freakin’ frying pan, you asshole!”

“Only if you wait for me,” said Todoroki, running a couple of laps around the living room while keeping his ‘husband’ at bay.

“I’m definitely not waiting now!” roared Bakugou, skillfully jumping over the sofa to shorten the distance between him and Todoroki some more.

“You’re wasting more time chasing me around than if you just waited for a little bit,” pointed out Todoroki, evading Bakugou like a pro

despite the much narrower distance between them now. “Why don’t you go change out of your jogging gear, and I go get changed out of these clothes too? Then, we can get breakfast started together.”

“Stop trying to reason with me while running around the apartment with a fuckin’ frying pan in your hands!!!” hissed Bakugou, his ‘husband’s’ words unintentionally making him even more determined to get that frying pan back and then hit him in the head with it. Maybe a couple of bumps on his head would put his brain back in order or something - or so Bakugou sincerely hoped, because what the hell was even going on here?

“No,” Todoroki retorted, yet again taking a page out of Bakugou’s book. The way that had annoyed his ‘spouse’, though, they could very well be on the verge of spending the whole day running lap after lap around their living room. That wasn’t the kind of shenanigans Todoroki wanted to be up to that early in the morning. As he continued running and skillfully keeping himself at a safe distance, he wondered in the back of his mind, *Hm… What to do… At this rate, I really won’t be able to be around while he’s cooking breakfast.*

There wasn’t a chance of changing Bakugou’s mind - that Todoroki was painfully aware of. However, there were ways to compromise with him, difficult as they might be. The problem was that Todoroki might have acted too hastily earlier and had now pissed Bakugou off to the point of no return. That would hinder any attempts at reasoning with him. Ultimately, the only thing he could do to win this petty bickering session was to escalate things even further, at his own peril.

After one more lap around the dining table and sofa, Todoroki abruptly took a left turn, changing course towards the bedrooms. One would think that he had really screwed up with that decision, as not only was the corridor a dead end, there also wasn’t as much free space in that area of the apartment. But worry not, as Todoroki had a plan, dangerous as it might be.

He ran inside his bedroom without slowing down, cutting off even more potential escape routes. That was the bait needed to get Bakugou to also go inside his 'territory'. Since it was his bedroom, his 'husband' couldn't complain about anything that he might or might not do in there. So, Todoroki created a thin sheet of slippery ice on the floor as he ran towards his bathroom.

What happened next was a scene straight out of a silly comedy show.

"Ack…!" yelped Bakugou, his feet starting to skid uncontrollably the moment he stepped on the ice at the same running speed as Todoroki. Due to the momentum, he couldn't stop moving forward, even as he flapped his arms around to keep himself in a standing position or come to a stop, whichever one would prevent him from falling hook, line, and sinker for his 'spouse's' nasty little trick.

"....." All Todoroki had to do was silently open the bathroom door and let the ice do the rest of the work by taking his 'husband' to where he wanted him. Once the 'raging bull' had been successfully captured, he closed the door and locked him in there by freezing the doorknob.

"I hope you're aware that I'm so gonna kill you the moment I get out of here!" roared Bakugou from the other side of the locked door, actively banging on it to make his fury known ahead of time. *"Also, you can kiss goodbye to being in the kitchen with me! If you step foot in there, I won't be liable for whatever I might do to you with my extremely sharp knives!"*

Todoroki smoothly ignored those angry hisses, like the unbothered king that he was, and proceeded with getting changed. He was aware that Bakugou was all bark and no bite with this one. The reason being, it would get in the way of their unofficial mission. Close observation was part of Todoroki's learning process, and he knew Bakugou knew it. He might sulk at it, he might yell at him for it, he might even toss him around for a bit or serve him some spicier dishes for the

foreseeable future… but he would definitely not ban Todoroki from the kitchen.

Once he was done getting changed into a fresh set of clothes, Todoroki readied himself to set free the 'raging bull' once again. For his own safety, he returned the frying pan to the kitchen, making it one less heavy object that Bakugou could use as a projectile against him. He also melted and evaporated the ice he had created on the floor, making sure not to leave even a single droplet of water around that his fussy 'husband' could use as fodder for one more long scolding. Then, he also melted the ice blocking the doorknob, again making sure to leave no evidence behind of his trickery.

The moment Todoroki opened the bathroom door, he immediately ducked down. And for a very good reason, as Bakugou promptly pulled out the 'big guns' and stuffed his arm outside while creating a noisy explosion.

"This apartment might have some noise cancellation features, but it can't do miracles," deadpanned Todoroki, peering up at Bakugou's frowning face from his crouched-down position. "You're gonna bother our neighbours at this rate."

"If they dare come to knock on our door to complain, I'll make you apologise and bow to them while saying, 'I'm a childish little asshole who likes to annoy my 'husband' to the point that murder sounds less troublesome than a speedy divorce'," Bakugou snapped back as he grabbed Todoroki by the back of his t-shirt's collar and started dragging him out of the room. His 'husband' obviously tried to change his position and get back up, but a single glare got him to halt any attempts at saving himself from whatever it was that Bakugou was planning to do to him.

"Um… You're not going to lock me outside on the balcony… right?" Todoroki cautiously asked, letting himself be dragged while sitting on the floor, uncomfortable as that might be, while he waited to see what

would be his fate.

“Well, look who’s also starting to learn how to read minds,” snorted Bakugou, his moody voice dripping with sarcasm as he made his way out of Todoroki’s bedroom and into the living room.

“But it’s so hot outside already…” pointed out Todoroki, as one last attempt at moving his ‘husband’s’ stone-cold heart.

“You should have thought about that before you fucked around,” said Bakugou while shrugging his shoulders, already in the process of unlocking the balcony door. The moment he opened it, a waft of hot, stuffy air made its way inside the living room, very indicative of how scorching and humid it already was. “Plus, aren’t you the AC hero? Put that name to good use and apply it on yourself for once while you repent!”

I guess I really won’t be watching him cook breakfast this morning…, sighed Todoroki in the back of his mind, extremely heartbroken by that ‘punishment’ even though his face remained as expressionless as usual. *Next time something like this happens, I should come up with a different strategy…*

And just like that, despite having won his little bout against Bakugou, Todoroki still ended up having to watch his ‘husband’ cook their delicious breakfast from the other side of a large window panel as he, too, baked in the intense morning summer sun.

Chapter 65

"Where should we go to get the bouquet analysed?" asked Todoroki, halfway done washing the dishes after one more absolutely delicious breakfast - Bakugou changed things back up to the basics and made them a Japanese-style breakfast this morning, including rice, miso soup, salted salmon, and a few other smaller side dishes that would surely be used for the other meals for today. "We could go to my hero agency, but that would raise a few suspicious flags with my father…"

"Yeah, that's obviously a no," scoffed Bakugou, sitting on the armrest of the sofa as he updated himself with today's news on his smartphone. "Only a select few know about the villain cult group, and I'd like to keep it that way. We'll be better off if we don't involve your hero agency with any part of the investigation on them, if we can help it."

Plus, with how smart Endeavor is, he might connect my investigation of the lunatics with our sudden marriage. That would make him even more paranoid and against our 'relationship', added Bakugou in the back of his mind. Giving more fodder to Endeavor's rightful suspicions was very counterproductive to their overall goal. Besides, Bakugou was already busy enough dealing with his secret bet against his 'father-in-law'. He'd like to be able to focus on that without adding more unforeseen variables into the mix until the deadline they had agreed on.

"Then are we going to your place?" asked Todoroki next, taking a peek at Bakugou over his shoulder. "That would be the safest location to deal with this matter on the downlow, right?"

"For as much as I'd rather go without another 'you're working too much, go enjoy your vacation properly' lecture, we have no choice here…" sighed Bakugou, already able to hear Best Jeanist's incoming disapproving vitriol. "Best Jeanist is also the only pro hero I can count on when it comes to stuff like this. He might not like some of my

methods much, and he for sure can't stand the fact I'm keeping all of this as just an unofficial matter, but at least he knows how to keep his mouth shut."

"He has known you for long enough to understand it's impossible to keep you under control *or* following the rules down to a T," pointed out Todoroki, just a tiny little bit bothered by the 'only pro hero I can count on' remark. Seeing as he had teamed up with him and not Best Jeanist, Todoroki begged to differ on that. But he wasn't about to nitpick at something he shouldn't read too much into.

"Kinda wish the HPS Commission would take a page out of his book, but it is what it is," said Bakugou while leisurely shrugging his shoulders. Once he was satisfied with skimming through the news feed and had ascertained for himself that Best Jeanist would have the leeway to deal with an unannounced visit today, he jumped out of the armrest and started walking towards the kitchen. "Are you almost done with that or what? I don't want to let the creepy bouquet sit around here for too long. Who knows if time isn't of the essence for whatever message they hid in there?"

"Gimme just a couple more minutes, and we'll be good to go," requested Todoroki, visually counting how many dishes he still had to wash before he was done with his house chore.

"Hmph!" Bakugou wasn't all that happy about being made to wait like this, but he also didn't voice his complaints with anything more than that haughty scoff. He even remained in the kitchen, taking a seat on the counter opposite the kitchen sink this time around.

He has no patience, but he also doesn't want to get in the way of me finishing my chores, Todoroki chuckled in the back of his mind. He had truly 'married' a cute one, hadn't he? Temporarily as it might be, it made Todoroki a very blessed person. He didn't want to make his 'husband' wait for too long, however, so he quickly wrapped up the dishwashing and wiped his wet hands on the kitchen towel by the

sink. All Todoroki had to do, then, was to turn around, and there he was, looking Bakugou straight in the eye. “Sorry to keep you waiting.”

“I wasn’t waiting or anything,” scoffed Bakugou, ready to jump off the counter and finally go get their bouquet mystery solved. But as he was about to do so, Todoroki grabbed him by the waist and kept him where he was on that spot.

“If you were truly in that much of a rush, you would have left me behind taking care of my chores and gone to Best Jeanist’s hero agency on your own,” pointed out Todoroki, perfectly describing Bakugou’s usual MO. It was because he was so well acquainted with it that it felt even more meaningful that he had stayed there with him rather than take off on his own. That fact made some funny little things happen inside his chest and softened his expressionless demeanour with a small smile, even if just for a second or two. “So actually, I should be saying thank you for waiting.”

“Like I said, I wasn’t waiting…” grumbled Bakugou, unconsciously averting Todoroki’s earnest gaze. “Plus, I’m not about to tempt you into pulling a second ‘frying pan incident’ with either the creepy bouquet or the car keys.”

“Getting locked outside on the balcony taught me a valuable lesson, don’t worry,” deadpanned Todoroki, still very regretful of the missed opportunity of being glued to his ‘husband’ while he made today’s wonderful breakfast. “Next time I’m put in the same situation, I’ll use a different method to get you to wait for me.”

“So you haven’t actually learned a single thing, have you!?” hissed Bakugou, immediately grabbing Todoroki by the cheeks and pinching them hard until they looked as bright red as freshly picked tomatoes. “What’s with you lately? Are you going through a mental breakdown that made you revert back to childhood or some shit like that? ‘Cuz that’s the only explanation I can come up with as to why you made me ‘play tag’ with you just because you wanted to delay the breakfast

preparations!”

“No, I’m perfectly fine,” said Todoroki, able to talk normally thanks to Bakugou toning it down with the cheek pinching, even if he hadn’t fully let go of them. “I’m just having so much fun being with you that stuff like that ends up happening, I guess.”

“Oh, so you *are* annoying me on purpose, you little shit!” admonished Bakugou, once again amping up the cheek pinching and tugging at his skin as much as its elasticity would allow him to.

“To be fair, the annoying you part comes as an unintended side effect,” admitted Todoroki, not even trying to deny the fact that, at times, he did do it a little bit on purpose. Not the annoyance per se, but the wanting to horse around with Bakugou some more. He always had the time of his life when together with him; it was unavoidable that he wanted to augment that fun even more at some specific, more leisurely moments. Plus, his ‘husband’ looked so cute whenever he was sulking at him. Like right now. Todoroki simply couldn’t help himself. The urge to tease him would just sprout within him without him even noticing it was happening in the first place. Todoroki had the feeling that Bakugou also experienced the same type of thing whenever he was in a more devilish mood, but maybe he was wrong? He tilted his head somewhat, even with his ‘husband’s’ fingers still gripping his cheeks. “Is the time we spend together not fun for you?”

“…Uhh… Don’t look at me with that ‘puppy dog kicked by its owner’ expression…” grumbled Bakugou, unintentionally withdrawing a bit despite knowing he was in his full right to continue admonishing his silly ‘spouse’. Todoroki quizzically tilted his head even more, giving the impression that even he wasn’t aware of what he was doing right now. That kind of irked Bakugou, but not enough for him to go back to rebuking hellhound mode. He gave a few more pinches and tugs to Todoroki’s cheeks, even though his light ‘punishment’ was a whole lot tamer now. “Stop trying to derail my schedule and let’s get going already, okay?”

“Oh, so you do have fun when you’re with me,” said Todoroki with a small nod of his head. He was choosing to do exactly as his ‘husband’ would always tell him to do, and read the room or read between the lines or whatever expression fit this moment best. After all, the fact Bakugou hadn’t straight up told him ‘no’ was as good as him confirming that he did have fun during their silly antics - in his own tsundere way, of course.

“S-Shut up! Stop putting words in my mouth!” hissed Bakugou, his demeanour steadily growing more frowny and pouty. He yanked and pulled on those gutsy cheeks even more, but there was no maliciousness or anger in it. If anything, the pinching could now be better described as ‘an attempt at hiding his embarrassment’.

“So you’re not having fun after all?” asked Todoroki, his head returning to the same tilted angle as before. Bad as he was at social cues, he could still tell such a thing worked really well on Bakugou, for some reason. It was pretty amusing to see him squirming around trying to deny his earlier ‘statement’, but being unable to do so in a direct, straightforward manner. Which, again, confirmed to Todoroki that Bakugou did have fun when they were together, even during their more childish moments. *With how good Katsuki is at twisting other people around his little finger, you’d think he’d be a really good liar. Which he is, I guess. But sometimes, I think he sucks at it even more than I do. Like right now. It’s beyond adorable.*

Motivated by that heart-pounding sight, Todoroki pulled Bakugou’s waist closer to him while also leaning his upper body forward. His ‘husband’ was brought right to the edge of the kitchen counter, but with Todoroki standing in front of him, holding his waist and now also kissing him, there was no moving or slipping away from that spot.

The first two kisses were akin to experimental pecks, used to measure how much Bakugou was truly sulking at the moment. If anger had been the fueling source behind it, Todoroki would have definitely gotten told off for it yet again. But that wasn’t really the case, was it? He wasn’t admonished for it; he didn’t even receive a single peeved

glare. What Todoroki got was that adorable blushing pout that never failed to tug at his heartstrings. It pretty much sealed the deal for a third and fourth kiss, with these being a whole lot more passionate than the previous ones.

Bakugou didn't seem to be too against them either, as the hands that had been pinching his cheeks eventually moved from those two spots and slid down his face and then neck until he could wrap his arms around it. Where had that earlier 'let's hurry up and get going already' gone to? It had definitely gotten thrown aside to the backseat in favour of this kiss, that's for sure.

He's so not honest with some things, but then awfully honest with others. The fact that this sort of thing falls within the 'awfully honest' category is pretty dangerous, frankly speaking, Todoroki confessed in the back of his mind, his hand daringly sneaking its way inside Bakugou's t-shirt and climbing up his smooth back, despite his own foreshadowing words. He was usually a very unhurried person, but he had zero chill or qualms when it came to getting more physical with his 'husband'. If Bakugou ended up being as haphazard and willing as Todoroki was… Yeah, they were in for some trouble for sure. *Well, we're still on our vacation, so I think it's fine if we take it slow with the whole bouquet investigation. I'm pretty sure Best Jeanist also wouldn't appreciate it very much if we showed up at his hero agency first thing in the morning…*

Having said that (at least to himself), Todoroki completely put aside any thoughts about holding back and redoubled the intensity of their kisses. If Bakugou was up for it, who was he to say no? He didn't even think himself capable of uttering such a response to begin with, not while under his sensual 'spouse's' spell. Adding Bakugou's cute little reactions to that, like the way he would arch his back according to where Todoroki's hand stopped or how his fingers would grab onto his shirt depending on which area of his mouth Todoroki's tongue was currently exploring, this was exactly the perfect storm for a 'no holds barred' kind of affair.

I'm so glad I got us well stocked yesterday, noted Todoroki to his own buttons, now very much glad that he had disobeyed his 'husband'

when it came to the contents of the shopping list. The only thing missing now was a change of scenery, as a kitchen counter didn't seem a very appropriate location for whatever was to come. Todoroki slipped his hand out of his t-shirt and was readying himself to grab onto Bakugou's thighs and lift him from the counter when a most dreadful sound reached both of their ears.

Yes, you probably guessed it - it was the sound of their doorbell.

"Tsk…" Of course, Bakugou's immediate reaction to that irritating sound was a pissed-off click of his tongue. Never mind the cockblocking factor; he was annoyed at the mere prospect of yet another unannounced visitor. He hadn't even shared his new address with a lot of people, but the news of it sure seemed to be spreading far and wide at a frighteningly fast pace.

"Let's just ignore it," said Todoroki without a second thought, already seeing the writing on the wall if they were to accommodate one more visitor for the second day in a row. Bakugou would definitely not be in the mood to play a nice, friendly host, let alone pick up where they had left off after said guest took their leave. As such, for as bad as he felt about it, their front door was going to remain closed until they had done the deed.

After proclaiming that very selfish declaration, it went without saying that Todoroki restarted their making out, twice as keen in picking up the pace a bit more. He was also extremely eager to pick up his 'husband' and take him straight to their bed.

That's exactly what he would have done had the doorbell not rang a second time. And then a third time. And a fourth. And a fifth. And then a very long sixth. All in the span of a few seconds.

"Oh, shit!" yelped Bakugou, his upper body going as straight as an

arrow as he ripped their lips apart. He pushed Todoroki aside and jumped off the kitchen counter, adjusting his slightly disheveled t-shirt while basically dashing straight to their front door. Bakugou kept on cursing under his breath the entire way there. “Shit, shit, shit, shit, shit…”

“…?” Todoroki was left behind in the kitchen, extremely confused about what exactly was going on right now. Between the two of them, his ‘husband’ should have been the one most willing to ignore a possible visitor, especially one that was coming by without his explicit permission. But instead of doing that, he got all flustered and obediently went to attend to the ringing doorbell himself. Todoroki found that to be very unusual. Curiosity quickly got the best of him, so he, too, moved from the kitchen to the entrance area of the apartment. He was yet to get there when he heard Bakugou’s hissing voice.

“What the hell are you doing here!?” yelled Bakugou, his index finger still stabbing the answer button of the intercom linked to the downstairs main entrance of their apartment complex. “I gave you my new address ‘cuz you kept pestering me about it! But I told you to stay the heck away from here, didn’t I!?”

“Is that any way to talk to your freaking mother!?” came the voice of a woman, just as furious and hissy as Bakugou’s was. *“Open this god damned door, or you can start praying that I don’t give you the early burial you’re asking for!”*

“You’re one to speak!!!” Bakugou barked back, his frowning eyebrow twitching with not-that-repressed anger. “You’re not supposed to come here for a good reason, and you know it, you id-”

“Finish that word, and you’re going to need a closed casket funeral,” warned the older woman, her voice as dead serious as it was calm. That gave it the needed sternness and forcefulness to get Bakugou to shut up instantly, unwillingly as it might have been. *“Now open. The. Door.”*

"...damn it…" cursed Bakugou, keeping his voice as small as possible so it wouldn't reach the other end of the intercom. His index finger was trembling ever so slightly from vexation as it slowly moved from the answer button to the auto-lock button that would allow their visitors access to the inside of the apartment complex. Pressing that damn button felt the same as acknowledging his uncontested defeat, much to Bakugou's chagrin…

Oh. Now I see, noted Todoroki in the back of his mind, nodding his head along to the answer he had come up with for this small, last-minute mystery. *That's definitely Mitsuki-san, Katsuki's mother. I guess she decided to take measures into her own hands and get the 'family meeting' under her own terms, rather than wait for me to do something about it.*

When Todoroki had talked on the phone with Mitsuki the previous week, she had managed to convince him to aid her in getting the 'pretend mother-in-law' entertainment that she wanted. She was fully aware that their marriage was nothing more than a sham whose main purpose was to solve their individual problems, and that she was better off not getting too involved in it for her own safety. But, despite all of that, her desire to tease her son due to this unusual 'relationship' had superseded common sense and made her pick the more dangerous choice.

He was only on board with secretly helping Mitsuki get the meetings she wanted because he, too, wanted to undergo those meetings. Unlike Bakugou, Todoroki saw no problem with playing the dutiful son-in-law if that made his temporary in-laws happy. In a way, it was the least he could do after getting them roped into his own messy family situation. After all, had Todoroki not needed to get married ASAP to not allow his father to marry him off to an 'ideal bride', he and Bakugou probably would have only publicly announced their 'relationship' as their fake scandal rather than officially tie the knot.

Not to mention, thanks to their fairness clause, meetings with

Bakugou's side of the family meant meetings with Todoroki's side. Now that he was about to meet Mitsuki, he had the last piece needed to also finally get that visit that Rei had requested at the start of the week.

I'll go get some refreshments ready, Todoroki told himself, happily taking a sharp turn and returning to the kitchen. It was hot outside, and he did want to leave a good first impression with his 'mother-in-law'. Fortunately, Bakugou had prepared a fresh batch of mugicha barley tea while making breakfast and had stored it away in the fridge. All Todoroki had to do was add a few ice cubes to the glasses, and they'd be ready to welcome their last-minute visitor in a grandiose fashion.

Maybe showing how much effort he was putting into accommodating his 'husband's' family would make Bakugou easier to convince and less volatile when Todoroki inevitably announced they'd be going to pay a visit to his mother and siblings later today.

End Notes

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